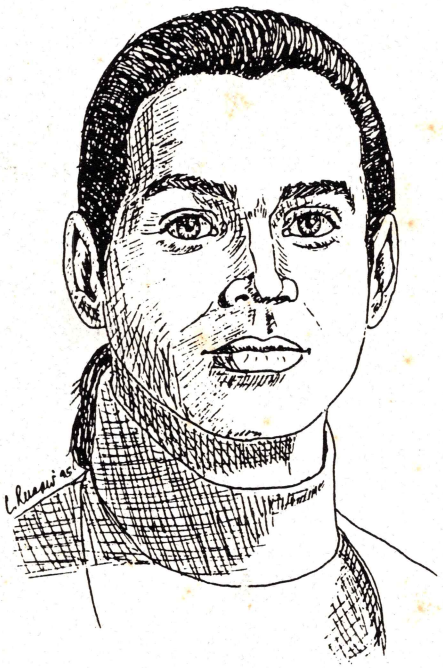
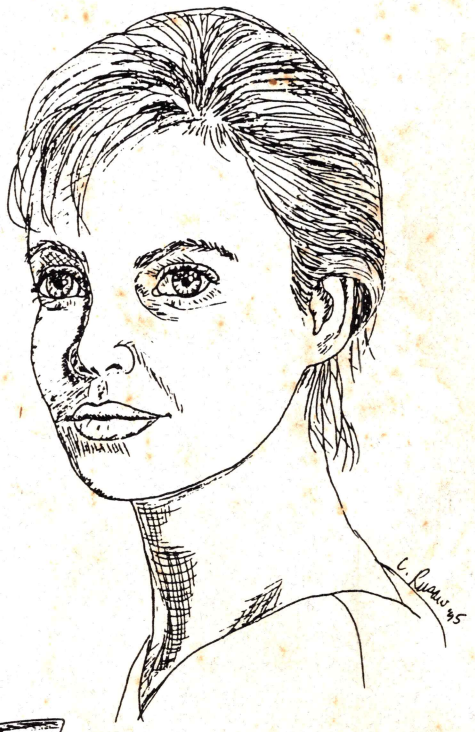
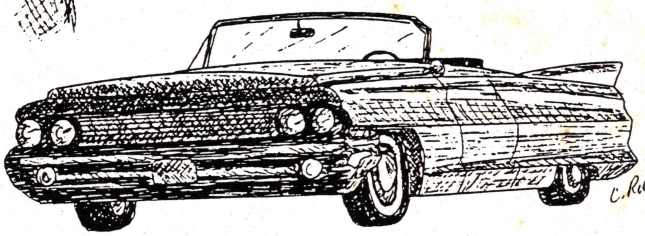
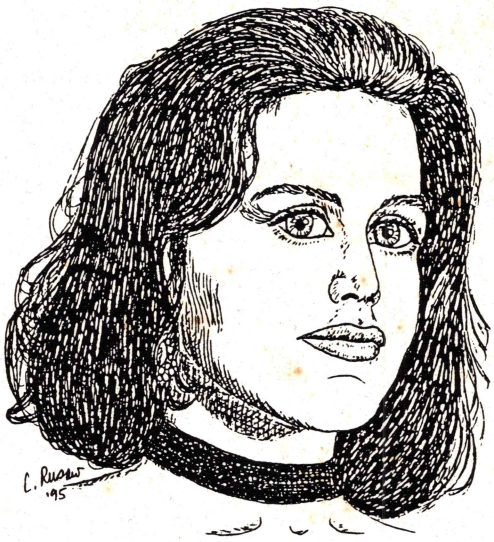
Crossovers Anonymous









CROSSOVERS ANONYMOUS #1

Behind Every Good Man ..... *Forever Knight/Highlander* 3
by Susan Garrett; illos by Kathryn Andersen

Laughter in the Night ..... *Batman/Friday the 13th (movie)* 7
by Joseph Medina; illos by Pat Degan

It's the Story... ..... *Professionals/Brady Bunch* 22
by Gena Fisher; illo by Gena Fisher

Just Like Old Times ..... *TimeTrax/Forever Knight* 30
by Amparo Bertram; illo by Pam Whitelark

Rasslin' ..... *Six Million Dollar Man/Champions* 40
by Jenny Hayward

The Double Image Affair ..... *A-Team/Man from UNCLE* 42
by Gina Martin; illo by Nan Nelson

Steve, Over the Rainbow ..... *Family Matters/Wizard of Oz* 51
by Anna Parrish; illo by Mark Dooley

Hellspawn ..... *Doctor Who/Silence of the Lambs* 60
by Joseph Medina

Learning to Live Forever ..... *Highlander/Forever Knight* 66
by Timothy Dedeaux

Sleep of the Undead: "La Belle et La Bête" ..... *Forever Knight/?????* 68
by Pamela Rush; illos by Martin Proctor

FURTHER ART CREDITS:

Cathy Rusaw ..... cover and back cover

Martin Proctor ..... cartoons: pp. 38, 59, 64

Anja Gruber ..... Highlander, p. 39
The Prisoner, p. 41
The Prisoner/MacGyver, p. 50
MacGyver, p. 65
Highlander, p. 67

FURTHER ALL-AROUND CREDITS:

Maureen Wynn ..... second-opinion giver, patient listener of panic attacks, all-around good egg.

Betsy Vera ..... pretends to know what she's doing; editor.

Last, but not least, thanks to my sister, Susan, for EVERYTHING.

Copyright Bentley Press, 1995. All rights revert to the authors/illustrators.
This is an amateur, non-profit publication, and is not intended to infringe on anybody's copyrights.

Bentley Press, c/o Betsy Vera, P.O. Box 4356, Ann Arbor, MI 48104

Behind Every Good Man[1]—

by Susan Garrett

Nick had just pulled the Caddy into his parking place at the station when a shadow stepped from behind the police van beside him, the metal of the raised sword glinting in the moonlight.

"I am Duncan MacLeod of the—"

"Yeah, yeah, I know the drill," said Nick, not bothering to get out of the car. He waved his hand at the highlander. "What can I do for you?"

"Uh—Nick, right?" asked MacLeod, sheathing the sword (he didn't *want* to know where) and moving up to the passenger side of the car. "Have you seen Tessa?" Nick's eyes narrowed thoughtfully and he almost slipped into a flashback, but the question about where that sword got put brought him back to reality. "I thought she was dead."

"She is. But, well, you know how it is." Duncan leaned against the car door. "They come and go. You think they're worm food and you're sucking serious face with this gorgeous woman, then you have a flashback or something—"

"Tell me about it!" commiserated Nick.

"I thought you might have seen something of her."

"Nat may have. They were pretty thick. I think she sent flowers to the memorial service." Nick pulled his cellular phone from his coat and tapped on the speed dial. "Grace, this is Nick. Is Nat there?"

"No, detective. In fact, she's disappeared last night."

"Disappeared?" Nick looked up at Duncan, eyes wide. "She's missing?"

"That's what the word usually means."

"Right. I'll check into it." He disconnected the call and tucked the phone back into his coat pocket.

"You lost yours, too?" asked MacLeod.

"In a manner of speaking." Nick tapped the steering wheel for a moment, waiting for two brain cells to get together and form a thought. "Could there be a connection?"

MacLeod shrugged. "It's a cop show about a vampire, isn't it?"

"Vampire show about a cop," corrected Nick absently. Leaning over, he opened the passenger door and said, "Hop in. We'll cruise the city and see what turns up." "Great!" MacLeod slipped into the seat beside him. "And if we don't find Nat and Tessa, we can always pick up a couple of other girls, right?"

"I don't know about—" The thought escaped him, as he glanced in the rearview mirror, then turned in his seat to watch the approaching motorcycle. The rider wasn't wearing a helmet, and his expression could only be described as one of abject terror.

"Looks like a villain to me," said MacLeod, tapping Nick on the shoulder. "Think we should go after him?"

"He's stopping."

The motorcycle pulled up beside the Caddy and the man grabbed Nick's leather jacket. "Are you a cop?!"

"Actually," began MacLeod, "he's a vampire who's—"

"What's the problem?" asked Nick, in his best 'ignore the idiot beside me' manner, which was pretty damned good by now (he'd gotten a lot of practice since he'd started riding his shift with Schanke).

"You gotta save me!"

"From what?" asked MacLeod, hand reaching into his long overcoat.

Nick looked away—he just *didn't* want to know—then wrenched his leather jacket out of the man's grip. "From what?" he echoed.

"From *them.*"

"Them?" There was no smell of alcohol to the man. He glanced back at Duncan who, thankfully, now had his coat closed. "Them? There's a movie about giant ants called—"

"Just put me in jail," pleaded the man, looking fearfully over his shoulder. "I'll be safe there." Nick shook his head. "I'm sorry, but I can't arrest you unless you've committed a crime."

The man hesitated and looked over his shoulder again. "How about kidnapping?" he asked, in a whisper.

"That's a crime," agreed Duncan.

---

[1] *This story was posted originally on FORKNI-L.*

"Usually." Nick simply glared at him, then turned his attention back to the man. "Who did you kidnap?"

The man paused and scratched the side of his head. "Well, you see, I had this idea. All these tough guys, these heroes...they save the girl every week, you know?"

"I have a vague idea," answered MacLeod.

"Well, I figure I'd kidnap all the leading ladies."

Nick started. "What?"

The man ducked his head, as if embarrassed. "They always seem so easy to kidnap, right? So I'd kidnap'em, smuggle 'em all to one spot, and then the heroes would have to do whatever I wanted. Kind of a heroine smuggling ring."

MacLeod jumped out of the car and started around the back of the Caddy. "Did you take Tessa?"

The man stared at him. "She's dead, isn't she?"

"What about Natalie Lambert?" asked Nick.

The man turned pale. "You mean *Dr.* Lambert? God, she's one of the worst!"

Nick tried to open the car door, but the motorcycle was leaning against it. MacLeod asked, "What do you mean by 'the worst'?"

The man shuddered. "I'd never thought about it before," he said shakily. "Who knew? You see these girls get kidnapped and attacked week after week and you figure, hey, how tough can this be? But they never let on they're the ones in charge, that *they* save the heroes' butts every week. Oh, you guys *think* you've got it together, but you'd know different if you saw a room full of them, comparing notes and—"

At that, several cars, vans, and at least one motor home/camper came screaming around the far corner. The man yelped and gunned the motorcycle, calling, "I'm getting the hell out of here, and you would, too, if you knew what was good for you!"

MacLeod smiled and leaned against the car, arms folded. "I think I can handle a couple of leading ladies."

"Do the words *Thelma and Louise* mean anything to you?" asked the man. With a last, desperate look over his shoulder, he gunned the engine and roared into the street. Most of the oncoming cars swerved to avoid him, horns blaring, but the motor home pulled up a short distance from the Caddy.

"Thanks, just drop me off here," called Natalie's voice from inside. The side door of the motor home opened and she walked down to the lower step, then looked up as Nick exited the car. "Nick? And Duncan? What are you doing here?"

"Hi, Nat," said Duncan with a wave, although he seemed to be making an attempt at peering in the darkened windows of the motor home.

"Nat, what's going on?" asked Nick. He placed his hand on her arm and took a step toward the vehicle, jumping when the horn beeped. "Grace said you disappeared."

"Oh—that." She cleared her throat and looked away. "I—uh—just stepped out for a minute, was looking for another serial killer for you to save me from and I ran into some old friends." Natalie grinned up at Nick and squeezed his arm tightly. "Glad you're here. You probably saved my life. Let me just—" She walked back to the door and tapped on it, calling, "Thanks, ladies."

"Wait a minute!" called MacLeod, catching the door handle. "Is Tessa in there?"

Nat stared at him. "Isn't she dead?"

"You never know." He opened the door a little, then glanced at her. "Mind if I check?"

Natalie stepped back and shrugged. "Fine by me."

MacLeod shrugged his shoulder, setting his jacket in place, then pushed back his ponytail. He opened the door a little more and stepped up into the camper. "Excuse me, ladies, but—ulp!"

In a split second, he was hauled bodily into the camper. The door slammed behind him and it sped away, horn beeping.

"Bye, girls!" Natalie waved at the retreating vehicle. "Have fun!"

Nick stared at her, then at the camper, which was breaking a number of laws, including the local city ordinances and several of physics. "Did they just kidnap Duncan?"

"Kidnap?" echoed Natalie innocently, eyes wide. "Nooooo. Wouldn't call it *kidnapping*. You didn't hear him complaining, did you?" She grinned, looking down the road to where the camper had disappeared. "Bet you he's gonna be real glad he's immortal. Especially after Tessa gets hold of him."

"So, Tessa's *not* dead?"

"Oh, she's dead, all right. And she's pissed as hell." Natalie gestured toward where the camper had been. "Not that I blame her. You'd figure he'd at least wait until the body's cold before he starts hopping into the sack with every female guest star of the week. Boy, you ever do that to *me* and I'll haunt you in every flashback you ever have, buddy."

Nick paled, which was quite an achievement. "Uh, I wouldn't let anything happen to—"

"Aw, get a clue, would you? It's only a matter of time. One serious lip-lock and I'm taking a dirt nap." Natalie frowned and tapped her foot against the pavement, muttering something about *damned double standards.*

"Are you all right?" asked Nick, backing away from her.

A moment later and she smiled at him. "Fine. Like I said, you got here just in time. Would you mind giving me a lift back to the office?"

"Uh, sure." Nick headed toward the car. Once inside, he waited until she was buckled in, then asked, "Are you drunk?"

"Drunk? Naw," she punched him lightly in the arm. "Just full of high spirits. Great groups of gals, there. Especially Suzanne—we had a lot in common, being doctors and all. She was a little spooked when she first saw me," Natalie admitted. "Said something about aliens."

"Aliens." Nick shrugged and started the Caddy.

"Yeah. Not like Micki." Natalie shook her head and rolled down the Caddy window. "Boy, has *she* got problems! Showed me a picture of her old fiancé—he was the *spitting* image of Roger. Geez!" She shuddered. "And then she invests two seasons in a leading man and he gets turned into a ten-year-old kid. What a waste! And most of the time you guys act like ten-year-olds to begin with—no offense."

He glanced over at her, wide-eyed. "None taken—I think."

With a sigh, Natalie leaned back in the seat. "And *poor* Lois. At least I know you're a vampire and you know that I know you're a vampire, so that makes it easy—right?" Nick was just as glad she didn't give him a chance to answer, continuing with, "But she *knows* Clark Kent is Superman and she can't let on because it would destroy his little super-powered ego. Want to talk about frustration in a relationship!"

Nick swallowed. "Clark Kent is Superman?"

"Yeah." Natalie grinned at him. "But you didn't hear it from me."

"Okay."

She leaned over and squeezed his arm. "Boy, am I glad you showed up when you did. And I was gonna ask you something—remember how I was talking about you getting a pet? Maybe a fish?"

"Yeah?" asked Nick suspiciously. "But I don't think any of the pet stores are open this late. I could get a goldfish tomorrow."

"I was thinking about something a little bigger. Maybe we could swing by the aquarium." When he raised an eyebrow, she added, "Something a little larger. Like...a tuna."

"A...tuna?"

"Yeah." Natalie nodded, then looked out the window again. "Talking to the girls got me thinking. It's only a matter of time before LaCroix shows up again—"

Nick cleared his throat. "LaCroix's *dead.*"

"So's Tessa." When he stared at her, alarmed, she continued to look out the window. "A girl's gotta be prepared, you know. And Micki turned me on to some really *interesting* information about vampires...."

Nick sighed, only half-listening, and began to long for the days of *Starsky and Hutch* or *Bonanza,* where the female leads usually lasted no longer than the second commercial.

from *Friday the 13th: The Series*—blooper reel (transcribed by Susan Garrett):

(The following is done as a dramatic scene—absolutely straight.)

Scene opens with Johnny, Jack, and Micki at a table upstairs at Curious Goods. Jack holds a paper in his hand, from which he is reading.

Jack: It says that among the ways to kill a vampire are holy water, a stake through the heart, and shoving a live tuna up its ass.

Micki (desperate): But where can we get one, Jack?

Jack: I wish to God I knew, Micki.

(She sighs, Jack looks depressed)

Johnny: My father owns a fish store. (Beat) Maybe we should talk to him.

(Micki and Jack look up at Johnny)

Jack: That's a good idea, Johnny. Let's go.

(They rise and walk off scene.)

Laughter in the Night

by Joseph Medina

Police Commissioner Gordon looked out at the twisted darkness he called home, suppressed a mild cough, and went on drinking the lemon tea his wife had slipped into his Thermos instead of coffee. He waited behind his huge, weathered walnut desk in the comfort of his leather armchair. That was all he could do now.

After a few minutes of sitting in his office with only his rusty grey desk lamp and the tea to battle the gloom, a dark corner of the room crawled toward him, emitting a flapping sound like a curtain. The window behind him, however, was closed.

He raised the barrel of his revolver over the edge of the desk. "Stop right there."

The rattling in his throat hid the chatter of his teeth.

A tall creature in oppressive, black body armor flowed out from the dark, its cape flapping slightly with each movement. It spoke gently and in low tones with tightly held lips in a perpetual expression of mild distaste, as if containing a violence that a service revolver wouldn't have the power to stop. On its chest was the emblem that inspired the signaling spotlight Commissioner Gordon had used that night to summon his guest.

"You sent for me."

"Oh...." He uncocked his revolver, leaving it on the desk as he rose out of his chair. "Sorry. Just a precaution—"

It raised a gloved hand to dismiss his concern. The curved spikes on his forearms made the gesture into a mockery of human kindness. "Why did you call me?"

"I've...it's hard to explain. I got word from local police departments all over this side of the country about some serial killer." He sighed in despair. "They make this butcher sound unstoppable."

"He's coming?"

Gordon nodded quickly. "The FBI certainly thinks so. Even after leaving piles of dead kids wherever he goes—literally-then running through a handful of counties, he still hasn't been caught."

"Do you have any information on him."

"Yeah, for all the good it'll do. All the eyewitness accounts and forensics are a mess. If you believe half of the reports, he's been killed off in self-defense at least *seven times.*"

"I'll check it out. I'll contact you this time tomorrow night."

He nodded and moved aside to let the dark being walk toward the window behind his desk, which looked out at the swelling crescent moon over Gotham City. After opening and crawling into the window, the Batman jumped out and, with barely a fluttering of his cape, he disappeared into the night that James Gordon secretly thought of as the Batman's domain.

The Batman reached the various law enforcement agencies involved that evening. Some of them checked with Commissioner Gordon to confirm the suspicious phone calls from someone claiming to be the mysterious vigilante. Once the arrangements were made, he quietly left Gotham (so news of his departure wouldn't incite a brief tsunami of a crime wave while he was gone) and materialized somewhere outside a little shack of the police station near a boggy lake.

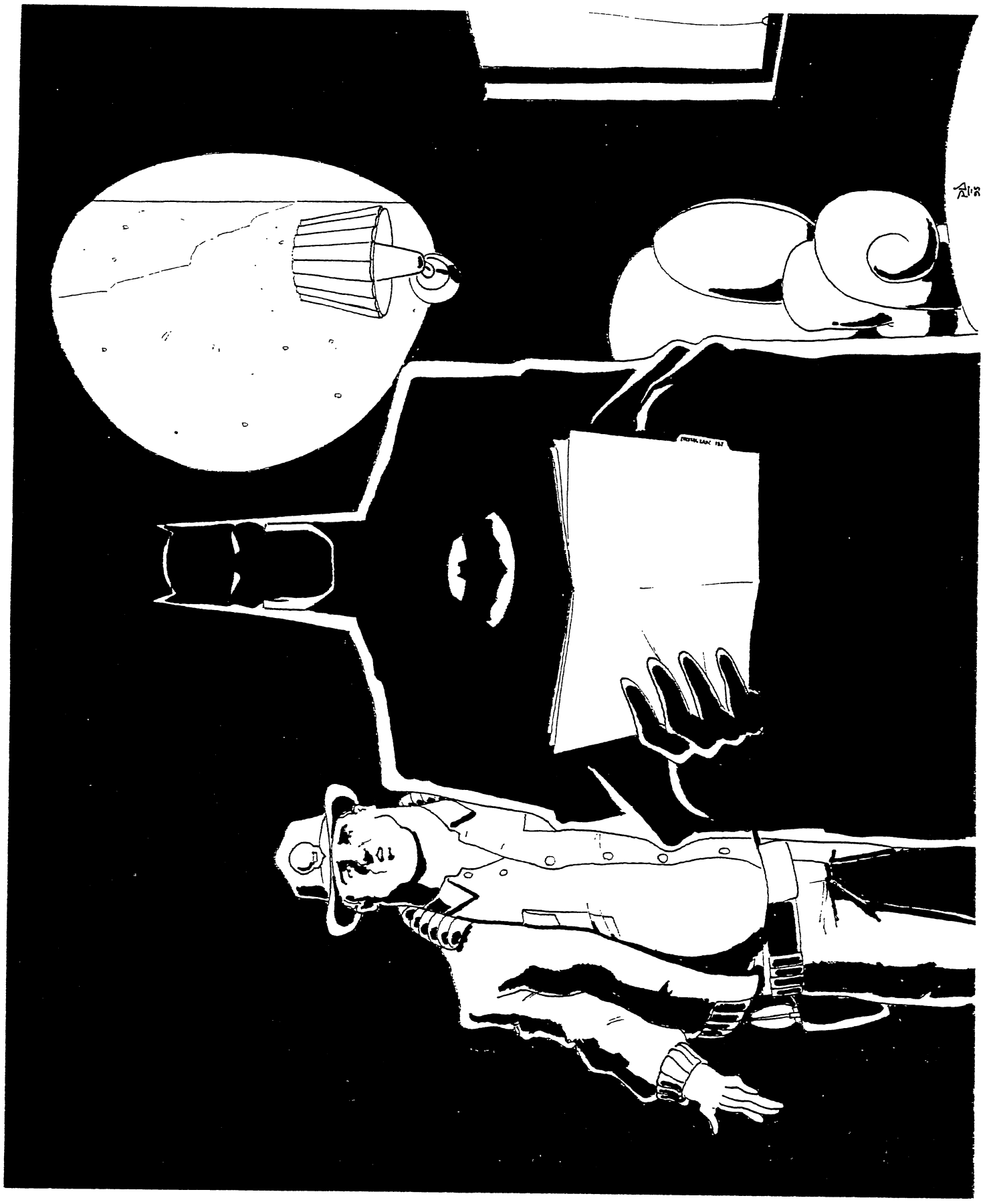
A sheriff met the Batman and escorted him to a camp site where the serial killings occurred most often. Escorted, hell, the sheriff thought. The Batman drove him to the site in a black car that looked like a cross between a Corvette and a tank; a beautiful, intimidating monster. Sheriff Karadenski did his best to look calm and authoritative as best as he could, tucking his beer gut under his belt. The Batman just ignored him and slipped into the driver's seat, paying attention to him only, glaring over the edge of the open canopy at him until he got into the passenger seat.

When they stopped in the gravel-carpeted parking area of the Crystal Lake camp, the Batman leapt out of the hulking Batmobile with a file folder, a thick packet of photocopies and police reports bound by a rubber band, in one hand and a flashlight in the other. He swept the beam of the flashlight all about the grounds, sending lizards and mice scurrying into the brush, waiting for Karadenski to leave the Batmobile.

"Shields."

"Huh?"

Karadenski had turned to look at him when armor plating slithered over and hugged the Batmobile. He tore his hand away from the chassis before the armor plates took his



fingers off. Servomotors clacked and whirred as the plates completely covered the vehicle. It reminded him of a snake swallowing a rat with one gulp. The breath of his gasp turned to mist.

The Batman's flashlight beam struck him. "Come on."

They walked through the camphouse by the lake, turning on lights as they went through each room and comparing each murder scene with the documents and photocopied pictures in the file. The Batman read the files aloud as Karadenski told him what he knew about the murders.

At one a.m., the sheriff called for a break and went downstairs. As he let himself plop into the torn, brown couch in the living room, the Batman stood in front of him like a monolith, file folder in hand. Tossing his hat on the tattered cushion next to him, Karadenski ran a hand through his hair.

"I gotta be honest with you, uh, Batman. I don't think we can look over all the murder scenes in one night. I mean, look at the ones we did see—"

"*I did.*" Karadenski's eyes darted up at the dangerous sound of the Batman's voice, for the first time in his presence, betraying emotion. "I've thought about it." The Batman took a step closer. "In this camphouse alone, there have been seven different killing sprees, mass mutilations. And only *now* did your department bother to so much as shut the place down."

The sheriff's tongue stuck to the insides of his mouth.

"Well, it's a, um, the case was kicked around from sheriff to sheriff for the last ten—"

"Is that why the physical evidence tells the ridiculous tale it does about the killings?" The Batman stabbed the file folder deeper into Karadenski's sight. "These files describe victims going into rooms without turning lights on, when the killer was wearing heavy boots and a *white* hockey mask in *moonlit* rooms. There was no way those teenagers could've missed him."

"Yeah, that's right, but all the clues say the kids panicked. They acted like sheep lining up to be slaughtered. What other reason is there? Well, in all the stupid ways they let themselves get killed, it's almost...funny."

"I don't know what's funnier: two teenagers impaled in the sexual act, or you looking for the thing responsible."

The sheriff sighed, looking away as blood burned in his cheeks. Batman's cape rolled and flapped as he spun to leave the room, kicking air into the sheriff's face.

The drive from Crystal Lake was long even in the Batmobile. Bruce Wayne spent the morning and early afternoon sleeping it off. Once Alfred explained the illness that kept Mister Wayne in bed and away from his appointments, Bruce spoke to the few people who dared visit him, in the main library, wearing his robe and a convincing show of exhaustion. What business he couldn't cancel, he attended as best and quickly as he could, so he could focus on the Crystal Lake murders.

Once the desire to sleep stopped hounding him, Alfred did his best to make him eat, to which Bruce pointed out that Alfred must've taken lessons from a mother hen. Grinning the way he often did whenever they'd taken the gloves off, Alfred said if Bruce Wayne could emulate a bat, he himself could emulate whatever was necessary to keep Bruce healthy.

Bruce glared at him, then pulled his robe tightly around himself as he led the way to the kitchen. "It's dinner time anyway," he muttered.

As always, Alfred served him a dinner typical of the Pennyworth name, a culinary delight...with two unexpected changes.

"Uh, Alfred." Bruce raised his glass off the wooden kitchen table and showed it to him. "This isn't white zin."

Alfred smiled at the glass of grapefruit juice before reaching for his own plate and drink to sit directly across from him. "Very observant, Master Bruce. Now, if I may be so bold—"

"You usually are, but *please,* don't break the habit of a lifetime."

"Thank you—"

"You're welcome."

"—As I was saying, you've been abusing the parameters of your health by neglecting your body clock. 'Circadian rhythms,' I believe is the correct terminology. For instance, you should have programmed your vehicle for the return trip while you slept."

"Okay, you're right, I'll remember next time. All the visitors during my catnap kind of backs up your point."

"I hoped they would."

"Listen. As long as you're in the mood for passing out advice, I want to talk about the Crystal Lake murders. You got the files?"

"Near your left elbow, sir."

Bruce had stuffed into his mouth whatever his fork produced from the salad when his eyes followed Alfred's finger. He opened the file folder to spread its content over the table between them. "Okay...Good, you got all the local folklore."

"Yes, sir. It was rather ancient material in microfiche." Bruce chewed more salad as he read. "Jason Voorhees. Deformed child at the camp, assumed drowned in the lake. The drowning looks suspicious, like either murder or incompetent supervision. His mother started the first killing spree, then he picked it up to avenge her death. He probably inherited the homicidal tendencies as learned behavior from her. Maybe...they were avenging *each other.*"

"Curious, this association with the lake," Alfred said as he cut his slice of beef. "Didn't he supposedly hide in the lake while stalking wary victims?"

"More like lived there, to hear it from the survivors. One kid tied a chain around a boulder and actually tried to tie the other end around the killer's neck. Who are they kidding...."

"Absurdity is another common thread of the actions of nearly everyone involved in the case."

"It's practically the single greatest tactical advantage the killer had. It definitely wasn't stealth, not with those boots on. Look at the footprints."

"Sir, I believe I have something."

"Sure. Let's hear it."

"Perhaps this man has done everything the forensic data would suggest. If he can in fact sustain mortal wounds, move stealthily despite cumbersome, quite visible apparel, and still brutally murder children, the ability to impair the judgement of his victims would not be any more unlikely."

Bruce gave him a long look. "You're not serious, are you?"

"Do you consider the evidence valid?"

"Well, yeah, so far, but—"

"You have discovered the truth by eliminating the falsehood, but the truth you find seems like an impossibility. Does that necessarily make your conclusion wrong?"

"You're quoting Sherlock Holmes at me, Alfred. You're reaching." Alfred gave him a patient look. He sighed and put down his fork. "Look. Okay, maybe it's some kind of device, like one of Tesla's experiments—"

"The killer's history doesn't suggest he would have the knowledge, let alone the access."

Bruce let his hands fall open as if pleading with him, and managed a toothy grin amidst his confusion. "You're talking about...supernatural powers. I mean, think about it."

Alfred shrugged. "It suffices to say that the only possibility that remains is that Jason Voorhees may be capable of all these things. I wouldn't speak to the nature of such ability, or even whether he knows that he has it. Its nature would be unorthodox, at the risk of understating the point."

Bruce looked away, thinking, then leaned closer to him.

"Whether he knows he has it?"

Alfred nodded as he ate, then mewed in mid-chew, eyes flashing open and hurrying to finish. "Perhaps he could be outmaneuvered by acknowledging how absurd it is to expect his victims to do such ridiculous things."

"Or that it's impossible for him to do what he does. Some kind of mass hypnosis?"

Still eating, Alfred nodded again.

Bruce paused before he finished his grapefruit juice in a long gulp. In spite of it, an elfin smile played across his face. "I'll be downstairs."

Like so many other dinners, this one was taken down into the Batcave and made a working dinner. Performing maintenance checks on his array of vehicles and computer systems, he kept an ear out for the police scanner to chirp as soon as a series of preselected keywords were spoken over police channels.

A call came in from the edge of town, a sighting of the hockey-masked Voorhees by a patrolman on the freeway. The policeman's voice was then cut off.

The pool of blood about his body, seeping into the unpaved earth beside the highway, glistened black in the moonlight. With flickering eyelids, his head looked on a few yards away.

Even as Voorhees dropped the policeman's body onto the concrete and took his squad car, aiming it toward Gotham City, a vault inside the Batcave had already been opened and shut, its echoing clank and thump underscored by the flapping of leathery wings. The Batman was already on the streets when the Bat Signal flashed onto the heart of the grey clouds enshrouding the city.

Jason Voorhees saw the demon shape flap its wings against the clouds, and didn't understand what it could mean for him. The Batman reached the Commissioner on one of the police radio frequencies, suggesting a plan that the Commissioner couldn't figure out but went along with all the same. Why anyone would want an annoying pain in the keister like Alexander Knox was beyond everyone who got the word, even Knox himself. Not that Knox cared; he was just plain, honest-to-Pulitzer tickled that Batman wanted him on an investigation. He tore his hat and coat off a coat-stand and slapped them on, juggling his notepad and tape recorder until they sat in pockets, as the City Editor was

still on the line with Commissioner Gordon. Then Knox blew him a kiss, beamed a wide insufferable grin at the newsroom, and went out the door.

He showed his press card to anyone with a badge until someone took him to Commissioner Gordon's office and, eventually, to the Batman who drove up to the station house. He joined the Commissioner a few feet from the curb where the hulking Batmobile sat like a sleeping dragon. Alexander Knox did his best to graciously thank him when he arrived.

"Hey, Batman, great set of wheels. It's gonna be a blast riding shotgun in this puppy."

Through the driver's side window of the Batmobile, the Batman stared at him.

"Oh, sorry. Alexander Knox from the *Gotham Globe.*"

Knox offered his hand, but only got a fistful of staring. The Batman turned his gaze away to follow the mist of Commissioner Gordon's breath to the source, looking into his eyes. Only after Knox backed away, biting his lip and waving at the Batman with a uncertain smile, did Batman climb out onto the street.

"Are you sure you know what you're doing?" Gordon said. Knox wasn't sure what to make of that, so he tried to look confident. He didn't have to fake being thrilled about the story possibilities. If only he had a photographer available....

The Batman kept his eyes on Gordon. "What's the latest information on Voorhees?"

"We're blocking him off as best we can. He's taken a squad car and is presumed armed and dangerous. We're trying to put the curfew in effect right now, but there are still a lot of people on the streets right now."

"What about the construction companies?"

"The Mayor talked to some of the local construction companies, and they lent us cement trucks and bulldozers. It took a lot of convincing."

"And the fire department?"

"Firefighters will be ready when you give the word."

Knox stepped forward. "*Fire* department? Sounds like a big pl—What am I *doing?* The recorder isn't on."

As he fished his hand-held tape recorder out of his trench coat, a cop came out of the police station, the zipper on his leather jacket jingling as he ran down the steps toward the Commissioner. Instantly Knox thumbed the record button.

Gordon took a few steps toward the bull to meet him at the last step, and instinctively gave his comrade a friendly slap on the upper arm. "Got something, Robert?"

"Yeah, bad news. Jason Voorhees got into town before the blockades were in place and nabbed a woman off the street. He could've taken out the fifth blockade before they were ready for him. McCally and Alverez still haven't called in, either."

"*Damn* it."

"We have to move now," Batman said.

The Commissioner nodded. "You heard him. Mobilize all available units and tighten up those blockades. End radio silence and tell them to box in that rogue black-and-white."

The Commissioner followed the cop to a battery of squad cars several yards down the curb from the Batmobile. Confused, Knox watched the Commissioner go before the Batman ordered Knox into the vehicle. Knox literally climbed into the seat next to Batman, who shut the canopy over their heads with the touch of a button just as the Batmobile surged ahead.

"Wait a minute, what's going on, where're we going?"

"You know about the Crystal Lake murders and the killer," said Batman.

Knox wasn't sure if that was a question. "Yeah?"

"We're going to trap Voorhees in the Shutter Project."

"Those Shutter slums? They're deathtraps. They'll get him first!"

"It's deserted. No one else must die. He's already killed three Gotham City police officers."

"How do you know?"

"I found the first. And what do you think happened to the two officers who haven't reported in?"

"Yeah, okay, I wasn't trying to—" Knox straightened his fedora and brought the tape recorder closer to Batman. "So why do you want me here?"

"A theory. Voorhees may be able to mesmerize victims into temporarily suspending their reasoning. I need someone to be there if it's true. Someone who can also break that mental hold by refusing to accept the absurd."

Knox smoothed out his tie with one hand, smiling. "And you thought of me."

"There's a police issue walkie-talkie in your seat. Take it. There could be trouble for you."

"Walkie—? Oh." Knox pulled the walkie-talkie out from under his rear. "Nice and warm, too. And hey, I'm ready for trouble. I got my notepad and trusty tape—"

"I forgot to tell you. There's an intense magnetic field engineered to erase unshielded audio/visual recordings."

Knox sighed, then checked his watch. "At least my watch still works." He dropped his tape recorder on the floor of the compartment, and brought the walkie-talkie to his mouth. "Commissioner, this is Knox. We're on our way."

Jason heard him as he drove into the Shutter District, a machete across his lap sticking to the legs of his denim overalls.

His hostage quivered in the passenger seat of the police car, her wrists and ankles tied up in torn seat belt straps. She leaned into the door, as far away from him as she could manage. Listening to the anxious reports on the police radio about them or the missing cops, she wondered what this thing in the hockey mask wanted, where they were going. He said nothing. Waiting to find out if he was going to rape her, chop her up, or whatever...was gnawing at her.

When he first grabbed her, pulling her backward by her shoulder-length hair and ramming the flat side of his sticky machete blade against her throat, he didn't speak. In fact, he barely made any sound at all even for his breathing, which was shallow and predictable even when he exerted himself, as if he had no genuine spark of life. A lifeless, pointless zombie.

Voices on the police radio inspired a flicker of life from the hockey mask. His head jerked and tilted slightly to one side, listening as he turned the volume up.

"Ninth blockade in position."

"Fifth blockade. We're ready now." "Blockade Fourteen in place."

"All units, we read you. Stand by and keep sharp. If you can hear me, Voorhees is moving southeast near Adams and Sixty-Fifth, according to our last sighting."

Following Commissioner Gordon's gruff voice, came a cold, angry voice.

"He's mine."

When she shuddered from the chill going down her spine, the hockey mask glared at her as if her shivering hinted that she knew what was going on on the police radio. She stared back, too scared to think of what to say.

As Voorhees drove toward a street corner somewhere between grey decayed buildings, they heard a low rumbling like a small, approaching earthquake coming closer and closer until it roared ahead of them. With a final and outraged growl, the Batmobile turned the corner and pointed itself straight at them. Voorhees yanked the steering wheel to one side and the car dodged the black hulking machine as it flew across the police car's path. The Batmobile spun in place behind the police car and headed toward it again, engines roaring as Voorhees yanked the car the other way. The patrol car did a wild jig into the left side of the street. The Batmobile bolted ahead of it, disappearing behind the street corner, leaving only a brief flash from its fiery exhaust in its wake. Voorhees stopped the car and watched it go.

The woman managed in not much more than a whisper, "The Batman."

He turned his head and his eyes pointed through the hockey mask accusingly at her. She wasn't sure whether she saw hatred or fear.

He got his machete off the floor of the car and laid it across his thighs again before driving the car around the corner. The flash of headlights struck from behind as the telltale rumbling returned, the epicenter sliding across the right side of the car. Light from street lamps and the moon danced about the exaggerated contours of the Batmobile as it materialized in front of the squad car. Jason's gloved hand tightened on the steering wheel. His hostage watched him react like Frankenstein's Monster as the Batmobile's exhaust flames filled their vision like a dragon's exhale.

Out of the dragonfire, a three-pronged hook sang forth and tore into the hood of the car. The Batmobile surged forward, dragging the squad car behind it and shoving both Voorhees and his hostage deep into their seats. Voorhees raised his machete and leapt through the windshield, crawling across the hood and broken glass to reach the immense metal claw. With one hand, he grabbed a tear of metal peeling away from the hook and, with his machete in the other hand, chopped away at the line. After several swings, the line snapped with an eerie *thwp thwupthwang,* flinging the car across the road like a rubber band. As the hostage screamed, the nose of the car slammed sideways through a plate glass shop window before finally stopping.

Batman immediately stopped the Batmobile and jumped onto the street toward the car crash. Knox followed him to the smashed police car. Looking through the tattered windshield frame and past the folds of deflating airbags, he saw the woman's head loll, her eyes half closed.

"She's alive! Get 'er out, get 'er out!"

He pulled at the driver's side door which didn't budge until the Batman gave Knox a hand. Then the Batman crawled into the car, pushing aside the withering airbags. "She might have a minor concussion. Ma'am. Can you move."

Summoning all her wits and strength with a long breath, she slowly nodded. He carefully pulled her across the driver's seat and out of the car, letting her lean against it. Gently, he rubbed the curved spikes on the upper part of his gauntlets across the seat belt material to cut her loose.

Knox pulled his walkie-talkie out of his pocket. "We got the hostage! We're on...Loma Street or Road or something, somewhere nearly Sixty-Fifth Avenue. Can you get some paramedics—"

The Batman put a gauntleted hand over the walkie-talkie. "Too dangerous. No one must come in or out of the area. Not until we find Voorhees. His body must've been thrown by the crash."

"Oh, come on—" Knox froze and looked back to the line from the claw in the police car's hood. Kicking aside the thick layer of glass shards on the sidewalk, he knelt beside the line and tried to pick up the web of torn metallic fibers where the heavy cord had been cut. The torn metal let out a dull ring when he dropped it against the concrete.

"Neither his strength nor his blade could've done so much damage."

Knox shrugged. "Aw, hey, he could have one hell of a sharpening stone."

The thick line began to wiggle like a worm. The Batman pulled Knox back to the squad car by his upper arms and shoved him against it, beside the woman, before he embraced them and threw his thick cape over them like a shroud. They heard the line emit a *ka-swang* and the thud of the line against Batman's body. When he let them go, they found the line intact, stretching from the patrol car to the monstrous Batmobile yards away.

"What the—" Knox pointed back and forth between Batman and the line. "Did you do that?"

"No. It proves my theory. Get this woman into the car. I have to find Voorhees." The Batman shot his grappling hook into the sky and glided up to the rooftops.

Knox waved at him with both arms. "Hey, forget it! He's dead! You saw the—Eh," he grunted to himself.

"Um...hi, miss." Hesitantly he raised his battered fedora to her. "Alexander Knox, reporter for the *Gotham Globe.* Are you okay? Can you hold out for a while until we can get you to some medical help?"

She muttered a yes while she rubbed her arms.

At a loss of what to say, he looked in the squad car and took a nightstick found lying beside the brake pedal. He peered through the windshield frame at ancient cathode ray tube assemblies and shattered TV screens in the shop, then helped the woman to the Batmobile. At the chimes of breaking glass, they looked back at the shop window as hockey-masked Jason Voorhees leapt out of it, kicking glass and TV screens aside as he climbed over the top of the squad car, machete in hand. The woman held her hand over her mouth to keep herself from screaming. Knox pulled her with him as he ran into an alley on the opposite side of the street.

The nightstick held precariously under his arm, he brought his walkie-talkie to his mouth as the shadow of buildings fell over them. "Commissioner, this is Knox. The lady and I are trying to get away from the killer. He's still alive! Send the army over here!"

Knox felt the woman pull him back, and stopped running when he saw the dead end ahead. Stuffing the walkie-talkie into a coat pocket, he looked out at the mouth of the stinking alley.

"We've got to do something," she said.

"You got that feeling, too?" Knox looked at the huge Dumpster beside them and pointed at something overhead. "That looks like a fire escape. Stand back in case I knock something over." Getting a foothold inside a metal cubbyhole meant for sanitation forklifts, he climbed to the top of the Dumpster, accidentally knocking down half-open but quite full trash bags, and pulled down the iron bar ladder with the nightstick. She started up the ladder as soon as it slid down to ground level.

"Keep going," he said. "We'll get to the roof and go down the other side, and wait for the cops there. It's okay, I won't look up your skirt."

"What are you talking about? I got slacks on."

"There, see?"

She smirked and shook her head before climbing onward. Shoving the nightstick under his belt, Knox was kicking trash bags toward the mouth of the alley to form a barrier against Jason Voorhees, then he jumped for the fire escape and climbed after the woman like mad. Neither the gritty rust that insinuated its way between his fingers, the slippery night dew, nor the chill in the metal bars slowed him down. The ominous shimmy of the fire escape as they climbed on nearly did, though.

She glanced down to see him as she climbed. "Is he slowing down?"

He looked at the ground when Voorhees thrashed through the mass of trash bags. "Uh, kind of. Hurry up, will ya?"

Knox felt like a flea on a nervous dog as they inched their way up the length of the building, climbing into the fire escape cage on the next level, bolting to the next quaking ladder, climbing some more, and on and on. His arms ached and his legs would soon. Lord knows how she felt, he thought, after Voorhees nabbed her.

"Hey, Knox," she called, looking down. "Can't we just go inside through a window and lose him?"

"We're risking life and limb as it is, kiddo. You feel how sturdy this is?" He patted the iron rungs once. "Inside it's worse. This whole *block* is condemned!"

"Okay, okay." She sighed and hurried her pace up the ladders.

After trying to tune out the repetition, the edge of the roof came into view when the fire escape rattled from below.

They shot up the final rungs and jumped onto the rooftop, then broke for the other side of the roof. Behind them, as they dodged air ducts in their mad dash, the fire escape slammed against the side of the building, ringing and creaking angrily. After reaching the other end of the rooftop, looking back and forth until they saw the first rung of another fire escape peek out over the lip of the roof, Knox looked behind him at the rung of the other fire escape as it shook as if in terror.

"You better go down," he said. "I'll buy you some time until Batman can find us."

Her initial desire to brave the heights and reach for the ladder disappeared, and she looked at him silently for a moment. "Are...you sure about this?"

He threw a glance over his shoulder at the rattling ladder, wetting his cracked lips with a cotton tongue. "Well, I, I gotta do something. Just hurry up and—oh, wait—here, you can tell the cops where you are."

She looked at the walkie-talkie in her hands. "Okay. Thanks. I guess I ought to say something, but—"

"Repeat after me. 'Dinner at my place.' Now get the hell outta here!"

As she stuffed the walkie-talkie into a pocket and began the climb down, she gave him a noncommittal smirk. He suspected that she'd have taken him to task if there was time, as most women had, but he wanted to keep her spirits up. And his.

Biting his lip, Knox ran past the air intakes to the other fire escape, thinking about the bricks attached to the first few rungs, held in crumbling mortar, and about pulling

them out and dropping the whole fire escape. He leaned over to grab a loose brick. Voorhees' coarse gardening gloves latched onto the top rung before one reached for his arm. Knox cried out and let himself fall on his back onto the rooftop, inadvertently setting free the loose brick which tumbled into the hockey mask with a loud whack. Knox looked up at where Voorhees had been, and smiled at the clangor of the body falling into the fire escape cage below.

After making sure the nightstick was still tucked under his belt, then picking up his hat, he ran to the other fire escape and climbed down. He stopped only once during his scramble down the fire escape to look down at the woman, who was two-thirds of the way down. He looked up at the night sky and the ancient scaffolding overhead.

Then the fire escape shook.

He slid down the rest of the way down the ladder, landing on the iron bar cage below, where he pulled out the nightstick and prepared to stand his ground, several hundred yards above the ground. He swung the nightstick once hesitantly, then a few more times as he got the feel, thinking himself a yotz for doing this.

As he waited, watching his quickening breath turn to warm fog, the fire escape spasmed several times until the cage overhead let out a clang. Then the hulk in denim overalls dropped in front of him and brandished its machete about its hockey-masked face before swinging it at him. He brought the nightstick up to block it as he dodged. The blade lodged itself in the wood, each man struggling, pushing at one another against their weapons. Voorhees yanked his blade free and Knox jumped back to the railing to avoid the next swing. He jumped at Voorhees once the swing was completed, and clubbed him right in the stomach. Voorhees turned to chop the machete into the base of Knox's neck, but Knox brought up the nightstick soon enough to catch the blade and pulled, hoping to pull the machete out of his hand. All he managed to do was throw himself into the face of the building as the fire escape bounced against it. Knox put the weathered nightstick in front of himself without a thought. Voorhees whacked away at it, chopping bits of the wood away, making Knox's arm ache from the weight and the impacts rolling through the wood and down his limb.

Knox's heart throbbed loudly in his chest. He knew this had to end soon.

Over Voorhees' shoulder, he saw a dark shape rocket down beside the fire escape, its cape swooping about as it stopped its descent and swung toward Voorhees, wrapping its legs around the killer's head and pulling him out of the fire escape. It swung back out into the air and, opening its legs, let him drop.

Knox grinned widely, tossing aside what was left of the nightstick. "All right, *Batman!* Great timing, guy!"

The Batman swung back to grab him by the waist and took him to the floor of the alley. "I told you to go to the car. Voorhees is too dangerous."

"But he cut us off—Well, we had to do *some*—"

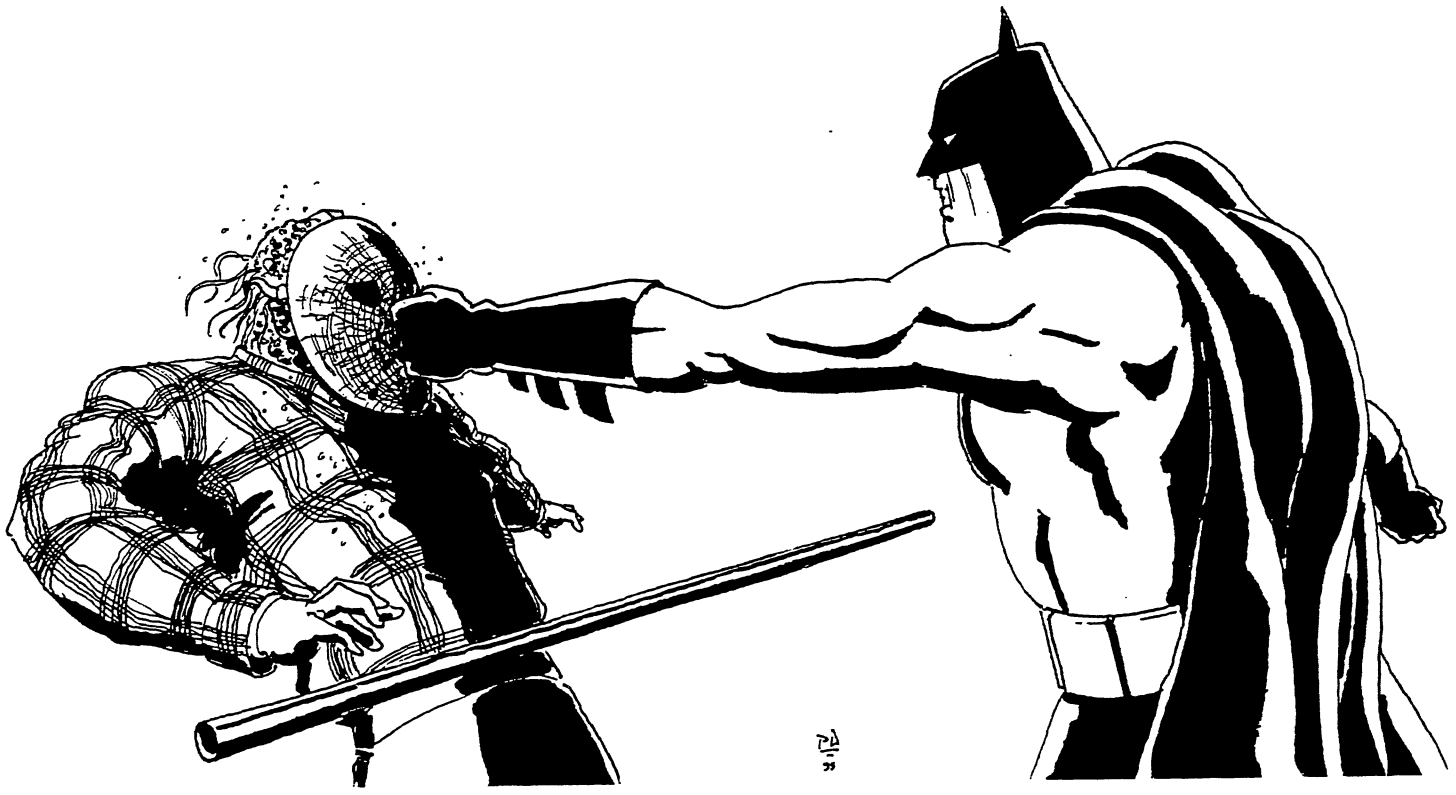
Before he could finish, Voorhees emerged from a pile of garbage. Knox turned and ran, missing his chance to see Voorhees look up and run in the opposite direction as Batman swooped down on him. The Batman's head poking out of his dark shape, he looked like a demon coming to eat Voorhees alive. Retracting the grappling line from the scaffolding above, the Batman dropped on Voorhees, arms and hands outstretched.

Knox turned at the sound of the struggle in time to see Batman jump to his feet as Voorhees stood, raising his machete. Batman raised his gauntlets and, dance-like, blocked each strike, sending a spray of sparks as the machete impacted against the armor.

Knox's face widened to make room for a grin as he stepped forward. "Wait a second. You, the LA Kings fan! How did you keep that Ginsu knife after falling off the fire escape and the squad car?"

In mid-swing the machete in Jason's hand disappeared, and he was still in the process of hacking at Batman's armor, each increasingly pointless blow getting slower and slower as the realization sank in. Batman looked over his shoulder at Knox, who added a wink to his grin.

"Almost as fun as that show with the robots!" said Knox. Batman turned back to the befuddled Voorhees and immediately kicked him in the gut. Voorhees ricocheted off one side of the alley into a pile of food cartons, tissues, and crushed magazines. After tearing loose a long metal bar from a discarded bed frame, he held the bar like a lance and charged. The Batman stood his ground and gave him time to aim the tip of the bar at the middle of the Batman's torso. When Voorhees was close enough, Batman punched him in the face, stunning him and nearly breaking the hockey mask, which must have been on the verge of breaking for years of abuse by axes, knives, outboard motors, and the ground.



As Voorhees swooned and spider web cracks rippled throughout the hockey mask, Batman held the bar with both hands and brought his knee up for a kick, putting all his strength into it to make Voorhees let go. Jason Voorhees doubled over and groaned loudly as he loosened his grip. Batman threw the long bar aside and sprung behind him, locking him in a full nelson.

"You're not fooling us again."

Shards of the hockey mask fell as Voorhees struggled like a mad beast, shouting hoarsely in an inhumanly deep voice. "No! People are sick with sex and blood! They killed Mother! They like evil!"

Knox craned his neck as he tried to follow the battle, writing the details in his hieroglyphic mishmash of shorthand and half-spelled words into his notepad, glad for his stint in sports writing years ago. "'They...like evil.' No kidding? And hack'n'slashing them isn't? Sure, perfectly natural."

Batman dragged Voorhees a few feet away from Knox, baring his teeth in a combined expression of exertion and satisfaction. "It's over, Voorhees. Tonight."

With a final shower of splinters and shards, the hockey mask fell away from Jason Voorhees' face as he screamed in anguish. Batman saw his body wither in his grasp and, in shock, let the body hit the ground as it decomposed before his eyes, nearly turning to dust on impact. The terrified belief of Voorhees' victims was no longer enough to dismiss the hundreds of mortal wounds Voorhees should have suffered. Batman turned away from the sight of that pathetic, twisted face peeling away from muscle and bone.

Knox was about to reach into his pocket when he remembered he didn't have a walkie-talkie anymore, then saw the killer's decomposed face past Batman's shoulder, grinning through a gory mesh of teeth and meat. "Batman, watch it! He's...That's it, he's using the disgust to come back!"

The Batman looked back at Voorhees who was back on his feet, recomposing, rising to face him as mummified flesh curled back into place around his misshapen head and mocking grin. Batman unceremoniously struck his nose, triggering a nosebleed and a wobbly stance.

"The moral of the story," Knox shouted, "is that'll only make him mad!"

Voorhees attempted a blow to the stomach before Batman fired his grappling hook, ensnaring Voorhees by the arm and the neck, and pulled him closer and slammed his forearm into his opponent's face, keeping the curved spikes away from him. As Voorhees tried to slide his arm out of the grappling line, Batman delivered the first in a series of punches to his chin, knocking Voorhees' head back and forth, again and again. Voorhees swept his bound arm

outward, snapping the line in two as he reached for the Batman's neck.

"Hold it! He can't do that!" Knox waved his notepad at them as if one of them was some moronic umpire. "What is this guy, a combination Bruce Lee and Bugs Bunny? He oughta be punch drunk as all hell an' that arm oughta look like chop suey!"

The Batman slapped Voorhees' grip away from his throat as if the creature were a gnat. "It doesn't matter. This ends now whether you like it or not, Voorhees." He brought a small box to his lips. "Let's go." Batman took him off the ground by the collar.

Voorhees widened his eyes. "*No—*"

As Batman hit him a last time and let him fall, a telltale thunder heralded the flash of headlights as they swallowed the darkness of the alley. Knox and Batman flattened themselves against the walls of the alley, letting Voorhees run away as the Batmobile rolled past them. Batman gestured to Knox to follow as he ran beside the vehicle, and they leapt into the opening cockpit. Knox held his battered fedora tightly to his head as the canopy slid shut. He felt the Batmobile shake as a heavy barrage of thumping sounds came from underneath his seat. The Batman seemed to ignore it, one hand on the steering grips as he casually reached for a row of buttons on the dashboard.

"We *didn't,*" Knox said.

A rear-view image of Jason Voorhees wearily getting off the floor of the trash-lined alley on his hands and knees flashed onto the windshield for a moment. "He has to be broken. The onboard computer has a limited artificial intelligence, intelligent enough to interpret information, but too logic-driven to believe."

He punched another button and the Batmobile shot backward. "So now what?" Knox said. "We can't take him in if he can do his stuff till the cows come home."

"This is equipped with a bomb." Batman poised a finger over a button Knox couldn't find on the black dashboard, and looked over his shoulder at the alley behind them. "We have no choice now. We'll have to risk being caught in the explosion."

"Sheesh." Knox looked back at Voorhees flattening himself against a wall. "Man, you better get used to being dead."

The sardonic smile on Batman's face sent a chill through Knox.

Batman pressed the button, hitting the brakes that shrieked as a dull grey sphere landed near Jason Voorhees' booted feet. He then hit the accelerator as another rear-view display of the alley behind them appeared on the windshield. Then the entire block exploded with the thunderous blast of orange-black flame.

Firefighters were on the scene instantly, containing the blaze as Batman and Commissioner Gordon had planned. As the last of the fire died almost an hour later, Gordon sent people in to search for bodies. He watched through the heavy throat-scratching smoke that hung over them, somewhere between the earth and the moon, dangling about the magnesium rescue lamps. He leaned against the hood of a police car, blowing away raining flakes of ash from his Thermos.

He turned around at the sound of footsteps, and gaped when he saw the woman walking around the crowd of squad cars and fire trucks. "Ma'am, you should stay with the paramedics!"

"I wanted to find out if they made it."

Gordon looked back at the mountains of smoldering debris. "Not yet."

"What about...."

"The man that kidnapped you? We found him, or what was left. Lots of burnt cloth and leather from his clothing, metal fragments from his blade and tee—Well, we're checking the dental records now. It looks good so far. No other civilians were even around, but.... Stay with the paramedics please."

She stood there, saying nothing as he looked on at the searching police officers and firefighters in the wreckage, then walked away. Shielding his coffee in both hands, Commissioner Gordon took a sip and felt guilty when the warmth ran through his body.

A low-pitched rumble, like a snow plow crawling through city streets, resounded throughout the rubble. All eyes tried to follow it until they saw the dark object burrowing its way out, reflecting the blinding light from the magnesium lamps. At the sight of the Batmobile stopped near the edge of the debris, shouts rang out. Its canopy slid open to let Alexander Knox stumble out. As he planted his feet onto the rubble, he broke into an amazed smile.

Gordon left his Thermos on the hood of the squad car and ran to him as the canopy closed. "Knox! Batman! Are you all right?"

Knox raised a hand to his crushed fedora. "Uh...yeah. The last thing I saw before going under was the buildings falling on us, like a concrete Red Sea." Rubbing his face, he turned and watched the Batmobile slither over the debris. "I guess we had an *oxygen supply* in there. So what happened to Jason—"

"He's dead. It's all over." Commissioner Gordon gave him a handshake. "Go get some sleep."

"Yeah....I guess I gotta get my story in, but...yeah." Knox realized that the Commissioner was actually smiling at him. "Thanks. Thanks a lot."

Knox began to walk away slowly, not entirely sure where to go, then raised his arms and jumped into the air as the Batmobile raced away into the night. "Hot damn, we're gonna live *forever! YEAH!*"

His story, which he described as a milestone in gonzo journalism, appeared in the morning edition of the Globe, telling how he and the Batman had cornered the Crystal Lake Killer, bereft of any details about the Batman's gadgetry and the less plausible aspects of the fight. Knox was even allowed a sidebar for his own personal account including his phone number at the *Globe* where the lady he met that night could reach him...once he got his forty winks.

Bruce Wayne sat in his tub, smiling as he read it. The smile came and went quickly, though. As he threw the newspaper across the bathroom, Alfred entered with towels in one hand and caught it before it hit the ground.

"Displeased with the commentary, sir?"

"I just didn't want to get it wet. Alfred?" Bruce sat up. "Do I still have a sense of humor?"

"Judging by your choice in nightwear, I would say so." Bruce leaned back into the waters, smoldered at him, and sighed. "I was just thinking about Jason Voorhees...wondering if I'm beginning to take all this business too seriously. If there's enough room for real life in my life." He looked away from the newspaper as Vicki, then Selina, ran through his mind. "The memories, the darkness...it's all I have anymore."

Alfred sat carefully at the edge of the tub, putting the folded towels in his lap. "I had my misgivings about your actions, and still do. But I doubt you will never become a monster like Jason Voorhees. You were raised too well for that."

"By who? You or my parents?"

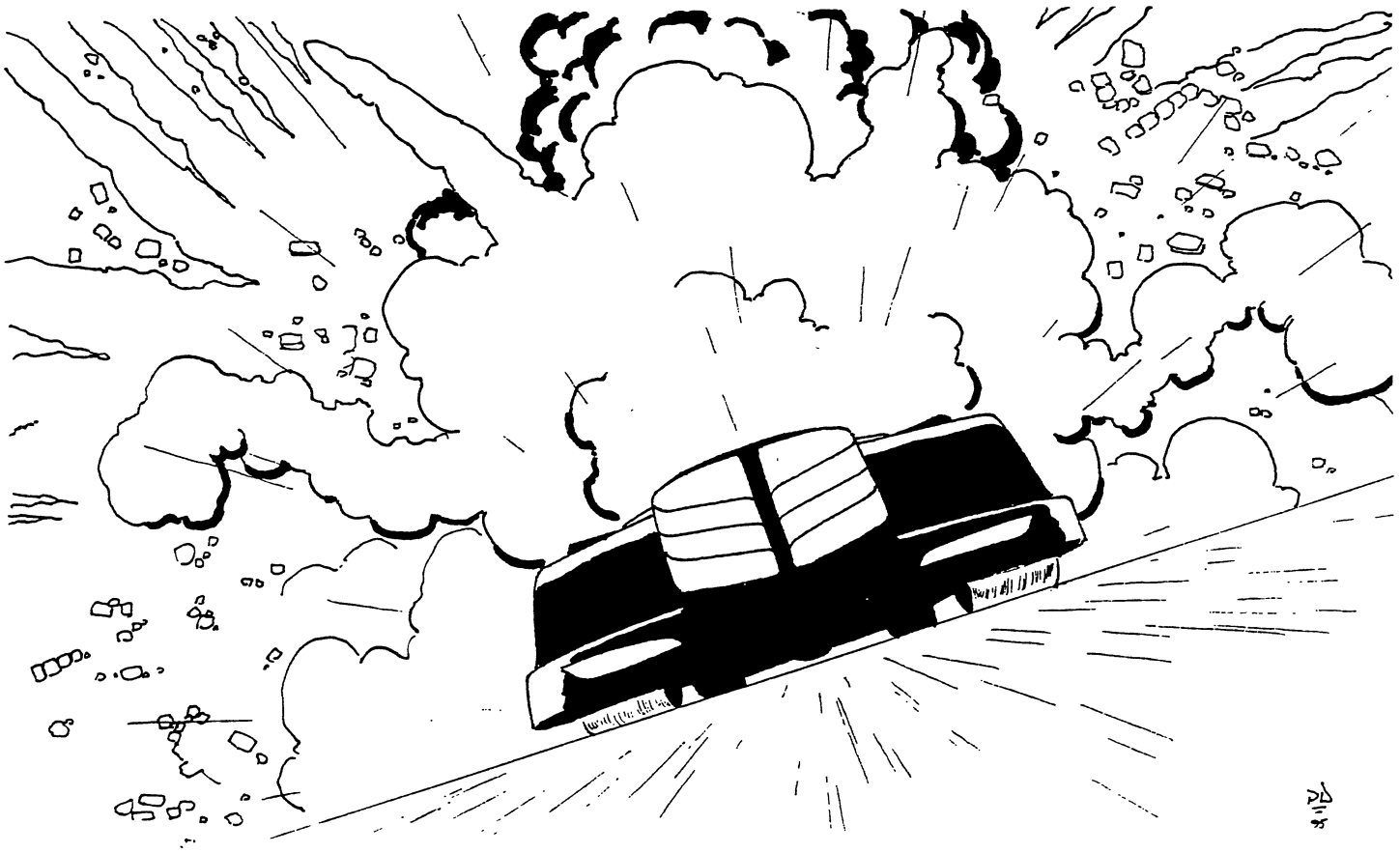
"Yes, sir."

Bruce shook his head and closed his eyes as one corner of his mouth curled up to begin a smirk.

"Now would you like breakfast or do you intend to retire, Master Bruce."

"Breakfast," he said, and found himself thinking about Winnie the Pooh.

Alfred cheerfully offered him a towel before leaving for the kitchen, and, after he left, Bruce saw through the bathroom window a sunbeam cut through the overcast sky of Gotham City.



It's the Story...

by Gena Fisher

I can't believe we're doin' this," William A.P. Bodie whispered, rolling his eyes and shuddering with distaste. Beside him, Ray Doyle just shrugged and went back to reading the paper. "Ray." Bodie tapped his partner's arm and waited for the icy green stare he knew would nail him to the seat. Exactly three seconds later, Doyle was glaring at him. "Doesn't this get up your nose? I mean, we've sat here, what," Doyle watched Bodie look at his watch, knowing full well how long they had sat in Heathrow airport, "Five hours and not a bloody thing has happened.

"What's your point, Bodie?" Ray folded the paper and pasted an innocent smile on his face. "The Cow says, 'sit in the airport, lads,' and we sit. For as long as it takes."

"Yeah, but," Bodie eyed a group of passing stewardesses, winking out of habit, "you really think Comrade Zoran is gonna saunter up to Pertrovk's plane and make a switch?"

"'s his last chance, innit?" Doyle reasoned. "Zoran can't risk losin' that report. All we gotta do is sit and wait for him to show and when he switches the cases we nail him. Pertrovk ends up with nothin' and Zoran is discredited when he takes the false report back to his people."

"Why can't they get it over with? 's bloody borin' sittin' about with no place to go." Bodie grumbled. "Can't take much more sittin' about like a bloody lump." Doyle shot him an affectionate look but stifled the report on his lips. It wouldn't do to amuse Bodie; he'd have to learn to master the stake-out in all its mundanity.

Thirty minutes later, Doyle nudged his partner's elbow and looked towards a group of men making their way to the ticket counter. Three men moved rapidly forward, scanning passing faces with interest. Bodie rose to his feet, stretching like a tired traveler and moved to a water fountain two steps away. Doyle rolled his newspaper, using it to shield his gun, and moved further from where Bodie waited. A lone figure, his dark trench coat flapping as he raced for a plane, sprinted between the group of men. As he maneuvered among the piles of luggage, his foot caught in a strap and he stumbled against one of the men, knocking him down.

"Excuse me." The late passenger helped the man to his feet, picked up his fallen case and continued the way he'd been going. The switch had been perfect. Only people trained to know what to look for could have spotted the trade. Doyle followed at a safe distance. His instincts told him exactly where Bodie was and when his partner would make his move. They were just about to that point when Zoran sprawled flat on the white tile floor, victim of a runaway luggage trolley.

"Get 'em! Doyle yelled. Bodie surged forward only to collide with a noisy group of Chinese tourists. Zoran cast them an evil look and ran for the exit.

Mike Brady smiled at his wife, Carol, and lifted his face to the sunshine streaming in from a skylight. Drawing a deep breath, he reveled in the freedom his job as Chief Architect at Harding & Gillooly Construction had granted. It had been months since they'd had a proper vacation and this one was going to be the best family holiday ever. He and Carol had sprung the surprise destination of their vacation on the kids only as they sped towards the airport. Mike grinned to himself at the memory of excited squeals his extended brood had uttered when told they were heading to England for a week of shows, sights, and adventures. Even Greg, seventeen going on thirty, had been impressed with his father.

"Mike?" Carol plucked at her husband's sleeve and they stepped closer to Customs. A rainbow of nation's citizens swirled about the customs counter, making everything seem exotic and new. Alice Nelson, the family's nanny, housekeeper, chief cook and bottle-washer, quivered with excitement as she counted the various Brady bags. Greg and Marcia Brady eyed every passenger as a potential date. The middle Brady children, Jan and Peter, were busy arguing over who had to pick up Jan's carry-on bag.

"But, Peter," Jan whined, "it's way too heavy for me." She already clutched a purse and tote stuffed with fashion magazines she'd read on the plane.

"Then you shouldn't have brought it," Peer reasoned. At fifteen and a half, he had male logic down to a science.

"Peter, help your sister," Mike told his wayward son. The middle Brady boy, being the dutiful son he was, did so with only a few small grumbles. However, the two younger Brady children, who by their very presence could cause trouble, should have been warned not to touch anything but by that time they had escaped parental notice and wandered off a small distance.

"Did you see that man?" Cindy Brady asked of her brother, missing teeth adding lisp to her words. She pointed at a tall thin man with a full red beard and wearing a dark trench coat. They had been standing with the other members of a Brady clan until people in brightly colored robes and strange

hats had passed. Then the two children had drifted slightly apart from the main group.

"The one in the spy coat?" Bobby asked. He and Cindy slunk down behind a mountain of luggage, careful to peek out only when they thought the man wasn't looking their way. They had learned their espionage techniques from the Acme Spy Kit five boxtops and $1.95 had gotten them.

"Ssssh," Cindy hissed. "He is a spy. I saw them watching that group over there and he's got the same bag that other man has."

"How'd you know it's got the same stuff in it?" Bobby asked, skeptically.

"Silly! You know what the Manual says, 'suspect everyone!'" Cindy reminded him. Brothers were a thick breed at best, and the younger they were, the thicker they were. "Look, he switched cases!" Both Bobby and Cindy watched the man in the dark trench coat bump into member of the group he'd been watching, knocking the man down. In the confusion, the man with the red beard walked away with the wrong case.

"We gotta tell Dad!" Bobby skittered away only to have his sister grab his hand. The man in the trench coat was coming towards them quickly; his sinister glance fell on the two youngsters. Cindy pushed a trolley full of luggage into the man's path, slowing his process and, as he tottered, almost sprawling flat on his face, this Shirley Temple look-alike snatched the case from his hand. Quick as a ferret, she and Bobby vanished into the crowd.

The man in the trench coat raced off in the direction Bobby and Cindy had taken. Once outside the terminal, he quickly saw the two children telling this tale to a group of tourists about to clamber into a green hotel limo. Jumping up and down, they pointed towards him in an excited tangle of arms. Nearby people were glancing at the group as they passed and a pair of bobbies suddenly looked towards the commotion. The man realized he couldn't risk any attempt to retrieve his case here in full view of Her Majesty's officers, so he flagged a black cab and took off in the flood of similar motorcars. Seconds after the man in the trench coat had disappeared, the automatic doors disgorged two more hurried travelers. Bodie and Doyle, trailed by a chattering Chinese family as if they were a New Year's Dragon, stared wildly in all directions. Then, acting as one, they raced for a small silver car in a NO PARKING zone and sped away in a squeal of rubber.

Yes, Minister. I will, sir." George Cowley pulled his glasses off and rubbed the bridge of his nose glaring at the telephone receiver in his hand. It had been a long day, what with Kate Ross demanding more testing sessions and Macklin ringing from the casualty ward to complain about the Bisto Kid's latest antics. He suspected his number one tearaways had been laughing fit to bust a gut when they filled Macklin's punching bag with cement and then asked for a boxing demonstration. However, he was certain they wouldn't so much as chuckle when they pulled every dirty job he could find them.

And now, in the middle of some of his biggest operations, he had to dispatch a team to watch over a visiting American couple and their children. The Minister had made it very clear all possible witnesses to the exchange between a Russian agent known as "The Red Man" and his contact were to be protected. 3.7 and 4.5's report had been amazingly vague as to why the exchange had gone awry, but when Mike Brady had rung a police station claiming his youngest daughter and son were being followed, it had set in motion a full-scale alert. CI5 had one more chance to catch Zoran and forever end the leak of information.

Cowley looked up from the notes he had made during the Minister's call and forced a benign look over his normally caustic expression. Rarely accustomed to it, he was somewhat taken aback by the wholesome smile which wavered on Mike Brady's face. It was echoed by his petite blonde wife, three daughters with their hair of gold like their mother's (the youngest one in curls), and the three dark-haired boys of varying ages. They had appeared in his office minutes before the Minister's call, waiting to be told what would happen to them. "Your Minister seems to think Cindy and Bobby's wild story could have been the truth."

"We have to assume that they saw the "Red Man,"" Cowley agreed. "We know he made a switch at Heathrow, but there were several incidents and he could have been involved in any of them. It shouldn't take long to figure out which one was the drop."

"But I wanna see the Hard Rock Cafe and Petticoat Junction," Peter complained.

"Lane," Cowley corrected.

"Oh...either one is fine," Peter said with a smile.

Cowley spent a pleasant twenty minutes with the American architect and his family, learning a bit about them and telling them how security would be handled in their case. The four younger children were impressed by his stories of daring CI5 cases, but the older two seemed disappointed that he didn't know any of the Beatles. He'd arranged for a safe house until his agents tracked down the Red Man, and would make sure the family had all they needed. "You and your family will be guests of the Crown at the Minister's request."

"It's all so..." Mike Brady's voice trailed off.

"Don't worry, Mr. Brady," Cowley picked up the intercom phone, a devilish light shining from his icy eyes. "You'll

have the best protection I can provide. Betty, inform 3.7 and 4.5 I wish to see them."

Of all the dirty, low-down jobs! Sod Cowley!" Bodie railed against George Cowley as Doyle drove the little gold Capri along London's back alleys at a high rate of speed. They were following, at a discreet distance, a grey lorry containing their latest assignment. Ray Doyle heaved a tired sigh and let his partner vent his anger. At least Bodie was cursing in English now, having depleted the range of African languages he had at his disposal. Doyle knew a lot of the anger was aimed at him for allowing Macklin to live after the latest joke they'd pulled. Bodie had been all for killing Macklin and hiding his body, but Ray had insisted it would cause more trouble than it was worth.

"Look, mate," Doyle interjected into one of the small pauses for breath Bodie took, "Let's drive the Old Man round the twist." He grinned, knowing he had Bodie's undivided attention. Of the pair, Bodie had often been credited with all the nasty pranks they pulled, but, in truth, Doyle was the genius behind such gems as SuperGlue in Murphy's shorts, the condom tree in Betty's office, and the cement in Macklin's punching bag.

"Yeah? Whatcha got in that evil mind of yours, Doyle?" Bodie asked. He slapped his hands together and waited for the word from on high.

"Let's just enjoy this." Doyle could tell by Bodie's incredulous stare that these weren't the words his partner had been waiting for. "Listen, we smile and have a great time, make the most of it. It'll make Cowley nuts."

Bodie digested the plan slowly. His idea of fun didn't include baby minding an entire family. But, if Doyle said it'd drive Cowley nuts, it had possibilities. And, besides, it wasn't as if the Old Man was going to listen to his bitching, at least not until Macklin's wrist was out of the cast.

"Okay, Sunshine," Bodie agreed, "Let's make ourselves part of the bunch."

This is wonderful, Mr. Doyle!" Carol Brady exclaimed. They had pulled up at Safe House Seven, cleared its security system, and trundled six kids, three adults, and both CI5 agents into the house. CI5 wasn't known for its luxury accommodations; most safe houses were little more than gutted cottages equipped with a security system and a few mattresses. But, when Cowley's old friend Lord Flabbershaw had offered his summer house, the wily Scotsman had accepted without hesitation. Its richly paneled drawing rooms and elegant dining rooms had witnessed many top secret meetings and now they would witness the American Invasion.

"Please, it's Ray." Doyle smiled his most charming smile and Mrs. Brady blushed pink.

"And Bodie." Not to be outdone by his partner, Bodie flashed a devastating smile of his own and deepened the shade to scarlet. Marcia and Jan, standing on the fringes of the display, sighed deeply. The two handsome Brits were even more dreamy than Davy Jones or David McCallum! There had to be some way to make them see the error of their lonely lives and commit themselves to a future with Brady women.

"Ray, Bodie." Mike Brady, totally sure of his wife and secure in his marriage, stepped between her and the two British agents. "This is awfully nice of your boss."

"Well, we want you to be safe as well as comfortable while you're with us." Bodie said, much to Doyle's surprise. But Bodie seemed to be getting into the spirit of the game they had chosen to play and had not grumbled once about being stuck with the Brady Bunch and out of the real action.

"We're spies, too," Cindy confided to the two British agents as she and Bobby trailed them about the house. Neither man having been around children much, they found the well-mannered Bradys a pleasant surprise. Greg had nervously asked about English girls, and that seemed to have broken the ice. Soon, even the youngest Bradys were clamoring for the two British agents' attention. And it was given willingly. Doyle laughed as he and Bodie were caught up in games fostered by the brood, thankful for the reminder of why they did the job.

"You are?" Doyle winked at his partner. "Have you caught many Russians?"

"Not yet, but we will." Bobby seemed sure of the fact. "We've studied our Spy Manual and know just what to do."

"We knew that red-bearded man was a spy as soon as we saw him," Cindy added with a smug nod of her sausage curls.

"That's why we took his—" Bobby stopped abruptly as Cindy stomped on his foot.

"Bobby, mom wants you." Cindy pushed her brother in the direction of the kitchen. Once he was gone, she cast a serious look at the two agents. "Spying is a tough job; boys aren't too good at it."

"Did you get something from the man at the airport?" Doyle asked, crouching down to speak to the girl at her own level. Bodie smothered a grin; he was enjoying this domestic side to his partner. Not to mention seeing the Casanova of CI5 meeting his match in the form of a six-year-old girl. "This is very important, Cindy."

"The Manual says not to d...divulge information." Ray shot his partner a nasty look; the rude noises Bodie was making

were very distracting. There was a stubborn light in Cindy's blue eyes. She did not trust him at all—yet.

"But you can share information with us," Ray added with a wide smile.

"We're the good guys." Bodie turned a dazzling smile of his own on the little girl and Ray watched in stunned silence as Cindy responded with a grin. His partner could charm'em in the pram!

"Cindy!" Carol Brady's voice brought the little girl's head around. She giggled at the two agents and scampered off towards the house.

"You don't suppose she really knows somethin', do you?" Ray asked.

"Could be." Bodie settled an arm about his partner's shoulders. "Maybe Cowley should have a wee chat with our Miss Cindy." Ray matched Bodie's devilish grin and they headed off to check the perimeter before night fell.

The household settled down, each set of siblings choosing a bedroom in a mad exploratory rush. Mr. and Mrs. Brady and Alice found rooms across from the children while Bodie and Doyle made themselves comfortable in the downstairs lounge. As sleep blanketed the city and quiet claimed the house, the agents relaxed. Bodie heaved a sigh, glad he had won the flip for the first watch, and snuggled down on the settee while Doyle made the rounds of all entrances to the house.

"Mr. Bodie" Bobby Brady timidly peeked over the back of the couch at the startled man.

"What?" Bodie bit back the irritation in his voice and managed a smile.

"Do you like being with CI5?" Bobby inquired, climbing over the couch and plunking down beside the agent.

"Well...yeah. We're the Good Guys and we try to make it tough on the Bad Guys. You have to be the best to be in Cowley's mob." Bodie knew the lad was wrapped in the glamour of what he represented but didn't want to do anything to encourage the boy too much. He remembered his own end to childhood; it'd come much too early and too violent for him to wish it on another soul. "Doyle and I both went through hell to be with this lot."

"What'd you do before?" The question spoken in innocence brought a smile to Bodie's lips. He loved to spin tales and could do so for hours.

"Let me tell you about my days in the Paras...."

doyle wandered through the house, checking doors and windows. Safe House Seven had a sophisticated security system, but it never hurt to rely on the human senses. He passed the bedrooms on the first floor and started down the stairs when he heard a door open behind him.

"Mr. Doyle?" Marcia Brady tucked a long lock of blond hair behind her ear and smiled up at him. At sixteen, she had the clear-faced, All-American looks teenagers were supposed to have. She also seemed to have borrowed her mother's peignoir.

"Yes, Marcia." Ray held his ground, eyes wild as she swayed closer in what he assumed she thought was a sexy walk.

"What does Mrs. Doyle think of you guarding a bunch of American tourists?" Before Ray could answer, the door cracked open and Jan slipped out. The two sisters glared at each other. Jan had carefully piled her ash blond hair up onto her head and adorned herself with a strong perfume. Her flannel gown and fuzzy bunny slippers ruined the grown-up effect she had tried for.

"Why, Marcia," she purred, "I didn't know you were out here."

"I bet." Marcia managed to keep herself between Jan and Ray. "Mr. Doyle and I were discussing his wife."

"Wife?" Jan appeared stricken by this news flash. "You're married?"

"'Fraid so." Ray said solemnly, but, having a change of heart, added," To me job. Now, I think you young ladies should go back to bed." He waited for them to comply and had to smother a grin as first Marcia and then Jan stood on tip-toe to kiss his cheek. This would tweak his partner's lady-killer ego, two teenage girls coming on to him like that. Doyle wished the girls good night and watched until their door closed.

And then I scaled the embassy wall. Seven pairs of evil eyes glared at me, daring me to try anything. I pulled my knife and threw it at the leader, but the others rushed me. I fought off the terrorists single handed until Doyle showed up." Bodie demonstrated his fighting technique by doing a few karate stances and kicks. "Ray handcuffed 'em and the other lads took 'em to the nick."

Applause sounded from the doorway. Doyle stood there, grinning. Bodie shot him a sheepish look. "So glad when I can be of some help," Ray said.

"Once in a while, mate."

"I wanna be like you and Mr. Bodie," Bobby proclaimed as Doyle sauntered in and made himself comfortable, long legs

draped over his partner's. "I wanna fight crime and arrest the bad guys."

Doyle raised an eyebrow at this statement, not surprised by the impression Bodie's fanciful stories had fostered in Bobby. "We'd like to have you, Bobby," Ray told the boy, glancing over at his partner. Witnessing the upset his words caused, he tempered the invitation by adding, "You'll have to prove yourself. Listen, when you finish school, come back and we'll put in a good word with Uncle George." Bobby's mouth dropped open in astonishment.

"You will!" He bounced to his feet. "Wait'll I tell Greg!" And with that he was gone, only an echoed "Thanks" evidence he'd been there.

"What'd you tell him that for?" Bodie demanded, every muscle in his body coiled with anger. He shoved Doyle's inert body off his legs and paced the room.

"Bodie, how many times, when you were his age, did you wanna be somethin' one week and somethin' totally different the next?" Doyle shook his head, remembering his own equal determination to be a fireman, doctor, cowboy, and artist.

Bodie didn't answer; he stood hunched before the cold grate, kicking at dead ashes. Doyle realized his mistake as soon as the words left his mouth, guilt squeezing his heart like a fist. Eager to make up for yet another thoughtless remark, Ray moved over to stand close to his partner, offering silent support.

"Sorry, Sunshine." He punched one leather-clad shoulder and waited for Bodie to speak.

"No, don't be." Bodie forced a smile. "Me own fault, gave up silly dreams to see the world." Bodie reached around and hugged his partner before setting off through the house. "I'll finish your watch and mine. Get some kip, Ray."

Doyle watched him go with a feeling of sadness. Since they both avoided talking about the past, he tended to forget Bodie hadn't shared his semi-safe upbringing. When he'd been telling his mum and dad about wanting to do to art school, Bodie's been fighting the other kids at the Children's Home for what little trinkets he called his own. And when Ray had quit school and joined the Met, Bodie was rotting in a Congo jail as good as dead to English life.

Closing his eyes, Ray settled back against the cushions. No doubt being in such close contact with the "perfect family" was like rubbing salt in Bodie's never-healing wound. He let sleep drift closer and fell into it with the thought that he'd try and get them reassigned even if he had to lick Cowley's boots.

Sssshhh." Bobby and Cindy slithered from their hiding place and crawled under a leafy bush to peer at the enemy. On the other side of the high fence, CI5 agent Sam Vashett slapped at a buzzing fly and scanned the grounds with his binoculars. He'd gone on duty at 5 a.m. and wouldn't be relieved until 1. It was only 11 a.m., and that meant he had two long hours to go. He yawned and stretched his legs, hoping this guard duty would end soon.

"Fox in Sox to Sam I Am." Sam Vashett glared at the r/t hanging around his neck. Snatching it up, he thumped the transmit button. "This is Agent 7.1 to Agent 1.3. Is there something you wish to tell me, Donna?"

"What's wrong, Sam, don't want any green eggs and ham?" Donna Chow's voice echoed with a chuckle.

"Is this how you would begin a check-in to Alpha One?" Vashett demanded. His remark brought instant change in Donna Chow's report.

"Agent 1.3 reporting west section all quiet." There was a small pause and then she added, "Fox in Sox out." Vashett shook his head and returned his attention to the section of Safe House Seven's fence he was guarding. The grounds were peaceful, birds calling throughout the wide expanse of trees that blanketed the estate's lawn. He and Donna chow had been assigned to roam the exterior fence, making sure the sensors were functioning at all times. And the unrelenting boredom of doing so for two days was beginning to tell.

Cindy nodded and reached for her Acme Spy Message canister. Bodie and Ray had been very impressed with her assortment of spy tools. Acme had sent everything a person would need for espionage. They'd remarked it was a shame CI5 didn't get their equipment from Acme. She scribbled her instructions to the foreign agent and sealed the plastic tube. Then, passing the canister to Bobby, she let him heave it over the fence to fall at Vashett's feet.

"What the..." Sam Vashett saw the red cylinder tumble through the air to land on the grass. Bending to retrieve it, he was unprepared when a red sports car careened around the curve and skidded to a stop next to his own battered motor. The man from Heathrow, still in his dark trench coat, gazed out at Vashett, white teeth flashing in his red beard.

"Come on!" Bobby insisted, tugging Cindy stumbling along behind him. She showed signs of wanting to stay rooted in place as the man they'd seen switch cases at the airport pulled something from his coat and aimed it at their unsuspecting playmate. There was a small series of popping sounds, but neither child heard them as they scampered through the underbrush, all advise from Acme Spy slipping from their brains as they fled.

bodie scowled and rubbed his neck. Doyle's finger marks were still visible on his pale skin, and his muscles were protesting the punishment they were receiving at his partner's hands. He lunged forward, arms reaching for Doyle's sleek form, and, at the last moment, twisted to the left, dropped to one knee, and intercepted Ray as he attempted to slither by unscathed. They went down together, a jumble of arms and legs, laughing at each other. Enthusiastic applause brought them both back to their surroundings. Marcia and Jan fairly fell over themselves extolling their admiration. Greg and Peter were trying out some holds on each other while Mr. and Mrs. Brady and Alice watched from the patio, cold drinks in their hands and smiled on their faces.

"Mr. Bodie! Mr. Doyle!" Cindy and Bobby yelled.

"Russian...spy...."

The two youngest Bradys defied all Macklin's training and swarmed over their victims like locusts. Bodie found himself being dragged along by a very powerful little girl, and Bobby pushed Doyle towards the direction they'd come from.

"Hang about, moppet." Bodie planted his feet and hauled Cindy up into his arms. "What's the fuss?"

"There's a man outside the fence and...."

"The red-bearded man!"

Bodie swiftly set the girl on her feet and helped Doyle round up the Bradys.

"Everyone inside. Stay away from the windows, keep low." The nine Americans, following Ray's instructions without panic, let themselves be herded inside. Once they were safely in, Doyle picked up his r/t.

"4.5 to 7.1." Doyle waited but Sam Vashett was silent. "4.5 to base," he tried. Static crackled over the small radio. "Someone's jamming the signal."

"Damn!" Bodie eyed the group. Mr. and Mrs. Brady were watching their every move. There was complete trust in both faces. An alarm sounded from deep within the house but gurgled to an end within seconds. "He's broken through the fence."

"And dismantled the alarm," Doyle added. The two agents stood looking at each other, reading the thoughts flickering in the other's eyes like a catalog of options.

"Was the man by himself, Cindy?" Doyle squatted down to the child's level and kept his voice calm. He could tell that the adults and older children were worried, but Cindy and Bobby fairly tingled with excitement.

"No." She shook her head and the golden sausage-like curls on either side swung madly. Concentration made her glare at Doyle and she added, "was the spy and another man in a red car."

"Okay," Doyle smiled at her. "He might come in, so I want everybody to hide."

"But we wanna help." Bobby held out his satchel containing all the latest spy equipment for Doyle's inspection.

"You can," Ray smiled and lead the way down to a stone-lined cellar. "Make sure everyone stays here. If anyone comes down these stairs, I want you to start shouting, okay?"

"We can do that." Bobby and Cindy glowed with pride and followed the other Bradys down. Bodie and Doyle went to work on their line of defense. Stationed in the dining room, Ray watched as much of the front rooms as he could. Bodie had taken up a position in the kitchen watching the back door and rear entry.

"Bodie?" Ray yelled at his partner five minutes later when nothing had happened.

"Still no sign, Doyle." Ray heard his partner open the swinging door between them and looked back at him. "Watch the door, mate." Bodie had his "don't-argue-with-me" look on. "I'm gonna check the front."

"Okay." Doyle let his partner slip past him and then took the empty position in the kitchen. He heard Bodie's near silent steps as he worked his way across the front of the house and up the stairs to the first floor. Gunfire cracked like thunder, rumbling through the very foundation and jarring Doyle from his post. His foot caught at the blue and white bag Bobby had given him. At the bottom, amid the clutter of Message Decoder, plastic I.D., and Spy Manual, lay the small grey case Zoran was supposed to take back to his people. Bobby and Cindy had taken the false report!

"Doyle!" Bodie's voice brought him back to the task at hand. 4.5, protected by an overturned table, waited as Bodie eased in to the kitchen and dropped down beside him. Blood seeped from a wound high in his left shoulder and soaked the front of his white shirt.

"You all right?" Doyle peeled back the material over Bodie's wound and peered at it.

"Yeah." Bodie checked his clip and knelt beside Doyle to cover the door. "Two men comin' in through the first floor, one at the front. Didn't see but the three. All the alarms are disabled and I'm outta clips." Doyle took in the bad news with a grim expression.

"Hate to rain on your parade, mate, but we got more trouble." He held up the papers Zoran should have taken. "We gotta make sure he gets these and gets away without killin' the Brady family...or us."

"Shit," hissed Bodie. Something crashed in the dining room, bringing both men to the ready. The swinging doors splintered and bullets slammed into the heavy oak table, scarring it more in five seconds than a hundred years could have. "Give me the case, Ray." Bodie fired random shots towards the gaping hole; a strangled scream said he'd hit a something rather than plaster.

"What you gonna do?" Ray asked.

"Make sure they get what they want." Using his good arm, Bodie smeared the fresh blood welling from his wound across the front of his chest and looked at his partner for approval. Doyle's face drained of color but he nodded once.

"Let me get to the cupboard first." Ray paused, then laid a hand on Bodie's arm. "I hate it when it's your turn."

"Now you know how I feel." Bodie waited until Doyle was crouched down out of sight in a small cupboard at the back of the kitchen, then leapt up and raced for the back door. Two steps from freedom, a shot rang out and Bodie fell to the floor. Ray bit the flesh of his wrist as he steadied his gun on his knee. From where he did, Doyle could barely see his partner, but he saw the black-clad figure who crept forward and retrieved the grey case from where it had fallen.

"He was trying to escape," the man said to a companion who entered. "He did not succeed." A red-bearded man nodded.

"The American family must be hiding. Kill them," Zoran ordered, taking the case and rifling it. Without another word, he made his way back through the ruined house. The black-clad man ignored Bodie and moved towards the cellar stairs as Doyle pressed himself further into the cramped interior. The man started down the stairs just as Doyle flung himself at the door to his hiding place.

As Ray burst from the cupboard, he heard the man cry out in surprise and saw him totter on the edge of the steep stone stairs. For an instant, the man seemed to defy gravity in a dance of twitching limbs, then he crumpled like a piece of used paper and fell heavily down the stairs.

"What the bloody...." Ray stared at the tangled figure lying in a heap at the bottom of the stairs. A stray spark of sunlight caught a thin wire stretched across the second step. He recognized it as the spiral binding from the spine of Acme's Spy Manual.

"We did it!" Cindy and Bobby Brady shouted. They did a victory dance around their fallen foe.

"You sure did." Ray smiled quickly then rushed to his partner. "Bodie, mate?" He helped Bodie sit up and checked him over for further bullet holes. When he found none, he pointed to the two young Bradys and said, "Think we better join Acme Spy School, Sunshine. They seem to produce great agents."

Well, 4.5," Cowley asked as Doyle met the car. "What do you have to say?" Ray cast a glance at Bodie but his partner was busy having his shoulder tended to.

"Uh, we need a new alarm system...sir?" Ray answered. "Zoran only had three men but he took the whole thing out."

"Do you know how?" Cowley watched the medics work on Bodie with seemingly undivided attention, but Ray knew better than to believe that. The Old Man would remember every word he uttered even under his breath.

"No, sir. They managed to jam our r/t signals and took out 7.1 and 1.3. Are they all right, sir?"

"Agent 1.3 is recovering from a blow to the head, and 7.1 has a broken clavicle. What of the Americans, the Bradys?" Cowley asked. The medics finished with Bodie and Ray moved around Cowley to let his partner lean against him.

"They're fine, sir." Doyle shot a look at his partner who nodded slowly.

"We helped!" Cindy tugged at Cowley's coat and demanded his attention. It was all Bodie and Doyle could do to keep from laughing as the small girl brought her scowl to force on CI5's controller.

"Did you, lassie."

"'not a puppy." This did bring peals of laughter from the two agents. "We're spies." She thrust her tattered Manual up for Cowley's inspection. "See?"

"Of course, young lass...where did you get this?" Cowley was digging in his pocket, pulled his glasses free, and squinted at the pages Cindy had given him.

"Cost us five box tops and $1.95," Bobby explained.

"That was truly a bargain," Cowley told them. "It cost me much more than that." Doyle looked at the last page where Cowley was pointing. A small gold seal had come unglued and beneath, in blue ink, he could read the words PROPERTY OF CI5 LONDON, ENGLAND.

"Mom says we can't join Mr. Bodie and Mr. Doyle." Cindy plopped down on a chair, kicking her heels against the rungs in disappointment.

"There are more important things in this world for you to do, moppet." Bodie scooped her up and leaned heavily against his partner's shoulder. "Bein' a Super Sleuth isn't as much fun as you'd think." He gestured to the bloody front

of his shirt. "'sides, don't think Ray and I want to marry someone better at the spy game than we are!"

"And in light of your...Super...status," Cowley watched the Bisto Kids squirm, "I have another assignment suited to your talents."

Since their involvement with the Bradys had ended with the American family being invited to the Palace and then moving on for a few days' adventure on the Isle of Wight, Bodie and Ray had prayed they were forgiven. But on reaching CI5's halls and encountering Brian Macklin, hand still swathed in white plaster, they'd known theirs was an on-going penance.

"There's a singing group on tour and the Met needs a bit of help. Seems the fans can't get enough of this family act." Cowley tossed a file on the desk and asked, "Have you heard of the Partridge Family?"

JUST LIKE OLD TIMES[1]

by Amparo Bertram

Darien finished buttoning his shirt on the way to the kitchen. "Visual mode, SELMA," he called out, smoothing down hair still damp from a morning shower. He reached for a coffee mug. "What have you got for me today?"

His holographic partner flickered to life behind him. She tilted her chin up and moved her eyes as though speed-reading off the ceiling. Her normally cheerful expression rapidly sobered. The skill of her programmers was evidenced by the sadness she could convey with a simple look. "Captain?"

He poured his coffee and turned to face her, steaming mug in hand. "Yes?

"I recommend that you take a seat."

He shook his head in confusion. "What?"

"Please be seated, Captain. It is for your own good."

Her subdued tone finally got through to him, as did the content of her message. He made his way over to the table and sat. "What's the matter, SELMA? Bad news?" He tried to imagine any twentieth century event that could upset her. The historical facts she knew were exactly that—history. Living history, true, but history just the same, to the both of them.

The hologram took a deep breath. "The Toronto police have reported a homicide which occurred last night at approximately eleven o'clock. They have a suspect in custody."

Darien set his coffee on the table. "And? I'm assuming there's more to it than that."

"There is. Captain, the victim has been identified as Mace Warfield."

For an instant, he nearly laughed. Mace, his impetuous one-time partner from the twenty-second century, couldn't possibly have been in Toronto the previous night. Then he remembered their stint together when they apprehended the fugitive Eli Tartareen. Mace had ridden off on Darien's motorcycle to escape being sent back where he belonged.

Darien clenched his teeth. That irresponsible fool! How could he have allowed himself to be killed? Why hadn't he let Darien send him back? Why hadn't he at least taken the time to learn more about the present? Why did he have to be so headstrong and reckless?

Why did he have to die?

"Captain? Captain, are you all right?" SELMA would have laid a concerned hand on his shoulder if the gesture would have done any good. His well-being was central to her programming, and right now his being wasn't very well.

He brushed at the tears that had managed to elude his self control. "I'm fine," he said tightly, his jaw muscles refusing to unclench.

"You don't appear fine."

"I'm fine!" he shouted. He took several calming breaths, unable to look her in the eye, even though he knew her real "eye" was in his pocket. "You said the police have a suspect?"

"Yes, Captain." She paused a moment to scan her memory. "It seems she has been hospitalized for an unexplained illness."

"*She?* Mace was killed by a woman?" He almost laughed again at the irony. It was probably how Mace would have chosen to go. "SELMA, I want you to get me there. I have to see him."

"Certainly." She cocked her head while she communicated with airline computers at the speed of electricity. "I have you on an 8 PM flight. Is that satisfactory?"

"Perfect." Beside him, his coffee steamed its heat away into the morning air.

While waiting at the police station for the man in charge of the Warfield case, Darien spotted a hardback novel lying on the detective's desk, some kind of Gothic/horror/romance, to judge by the melodramatic script on the cover. He was about to flip through it out of curiosity when its owner arrived, a cup in one hand, a wrapped sandwich in the other. "So, you the friend of the stiff?"

The scent of the detective's meal reminded him of the last time he had seen Mace. Darien couldn't send him back without his knowing what a hamburger was, now could he?

"You know, before I came here," Mace said, sitting down, "I wasn't sure how things would be between us." Darien nodded

---

1 *This story was posted originally on FORKNI-L.*

for him to continue. "I gotta tell ya, this was just like old times." He raised his hands in the traditional Mash Ti triangle and jabbed at the air to punctuate his words. "Still a great team, huh?"

Darien couldn't help smiling. "Just like old times all right, but let's leave it at that."

"Oh, c'mon, Dare, admit it—there's a few things that I can still teach you."

"Such as?" Darien stared at him in disbelief.

Mace grinned broadly. "My way eliminates so much paperwork!"

Darien fought down the lump in his throat. "Yes, I used to be a partner of Officer Warfield."

The other man's jaw dropped. "He was a cop? Damn!" He shook his head. "I never would have guessed. Look, I'm sorry about your partner." He set the cup and sandwich on his desk and held out his hand. "Detective Schanke, at your service. You are—?"

"Darien Lambert. And he was my ex-partner."

"Lambert? No kidding? Huh. Fancy that." He smiled at some private joke. "Follow me, Lambert. I'll take you to where Nat's working on your friend."

The woman looked up at the sound of footsteps. "Schanke? What are you doing back here so soon?" She had a knife in front of her with a handle in the shape of a dragon.

"Nat, I'd like you to meet Darien Lambert. He's an ex-partner of the victim. Darien, this is Dr. Natalie Lambert, our Medical Examiner."

Darien shook hands with her, understanding why the detective had been so amused by his name. "Pleased to meet you, Doctor. Tell me, how did Mace die?"

"Multiple stab wounds. We believe this was the murder weapon." She indicated the exotic knife with a nod. "I'll show you your buddy, but it's not a pretty sight."

"That's all right." He steeled himself, uncertain what reaction seeing his friend's lifeless form would provoke. When he saw the body, however, he frowned in confusion. "That's not Mace Warfield."

"What?" Schanke exclaimed.

"Are you sure?" Natalie asked, concerned.

"I'm absolutely positive." He felt a nearly unbearable weight lift from his chest as muscles he never knew he possessed relaxed. "How did you identify him? Fingerprints?"

Schanke shrugged. "Credit cards. They were in his pocket."

Darien turned away from the dead stranger and began to pace, speaking his thoughts aloud as had become his habit from years of bouncing ideas off SELMA. "If this isn't Mace, then he might be alive somewhere. Possibly injured. If he doesn't have his credit cards..."

He spun suddenly, startling the other two. "May I see the items you found on this man? My guess is that he picked Mace's pocket shortly before he was killed."

"Shortly? Why shortly?"

Darien grinned. "You don't know Mace." *Or CINDI,* he added silently.

Schanke observed while Darien poked through Mace's stolen belongings. "Be careful," he warned. "Something in there gave one of our men quite a shock when he bagged them, and I mean the electrical kind."

Darien smiled. "Of course." He spotted it instantly, a blank metal plate the same size and shape as a credit card. Mace hadn't gotten his computer "camouflaged" in the future, and the facilities to make CINDI look like a Visa or MasterCard didn't exist here.

He ignored the computer for the time being, not wanting to draw attention to her. Instead, he picked up a yellow matchbook with one word and a picture emblazoned across it in black. "What's Raven?" he asked.

"It's a nightclub. My partner Nick knows some people there." He paused. "You know, the Raven's not too far from the scene of the crime. You think it's a clue?"

"Possibly, possibly...." Darien mused. "If there's one person who would be able to tell us what happened last night, it would be CINDI."

"Who's she? Warfield's girl?"

"Something like that. And I bet her best friend SELMA is just the person to get her to talk," he added for the benefit of his own computer. She didn't always pick up on his hints right away.

"Enough with the name dropping. Are you done with this stuff? Good. Let me get this put away and I'll drive you where you have to go."

"I just need to make a phone call and I'll be ready."

PAM
WHITELARK
95

Darien quickly located the nearest public phone and put on his best "I'm having a perfectly innocent conversation" expression. "SELMA, was CINDI of any help?"

"She was singularly uninformative, Captain, which should come as no surprise. Best friend, indeed."

He laughed at her indignation. She thought CINDI gave computers a bad name. "What did she tell you?"

"Apparently, Officer Warfield had put her on battery charge mode for privacy. When she finished charging, she had already been stolen. A man then grabbed the pickpocket from behind, dragged him into an alley, and stabbed him repeatedly."

"So the murderer was a man?"

"A girl entered the alley and struggled with the assailant, who was frightened away when he heard the sirens of approaching police cars."

"The police have the wrong person!"

"Yes, but an investigation should easily reveal her innocence. CINDI indicated that the murderer took his knife with him, so the blood on the one Dr. Lambert is examining will not match that of the pickpocket."

"Then what was the motive for the murder?"

"Unknown, Captain. Evidence suggests that it was premeditated, that the killer was waiting in the alley for the pickpocket to walk by."

"Why would anyone want to kill a petty thief? Have him arrested, sure, but stab him to death?"

"If I may venture a hypothesis?"

"Be my guest."

"Officer Warfield could not have been too far behind the pickpocket. From his position in the alley, the murderer may not have been able to see their interaction. Thus, when the pickpocket came into view—"

"He was mistaken for Mace! Good thinking. Perhaps a fugitive whose trail Mace had discovered." Darien spotted Schanke returning. "Thanks, SELMA." He hung up the phone.

"You ready to check out the Raven?" the detective asked. He took a bite out of the sandwich he had left on his desk earlier. He held his novel tucked under the other arm.

"Let's go."

Schanke led the way to his car in the parking lot. He set the novel down on the seat between them. "I shouldn't be spending my time reading this again," he explained when he caught Darien's curious glance, "but what can I say? It's entertaining."

"May I?" Darien picked the book up and looked at it more closely. The cover announced "The Denied" in huge letters. A vampire novel, he gathered from reading the dust jacket. He turned to the picture of the author.

"Elyssa?" he whispered. No...wrong century. "Annie?" The photo depicted the exact double of Annie Knox, his close friend and the first woman he had met after arriving in the past. He knew for a fact that, despite her many wonderful talents, she was no best-selling novelist.

"Did you say something?"

Darien closed the book. "Never mind."

Darien entered the dimly lit nightclub while Schanke found a good parking space. He scanned the crowd for something—anything—that would give him a lead. He couldn't help wishing for Mace to come running up in his Rambo gear to greet him, but he didn't expect it. No. If Mace had let CINDI out of his sight even for an instant, especially in the possession of a man subsequently stabbed to death, then he must have been incapacitated in some way.

He strolled through the patrons of the club, most of whom were garbed in dark, somber colors, and neared the bar. As he did so, he caught sight of a familiar face. He didn't know whether to sigh with relief at meeting up with an ally or groan at the thought that yet another officer had been sent through the TRAX machine. As Mace might say, with the gang all together it would be just like old times. "Janine!" He waved to catch her attention. "Janine Nichols!"

His gesture drew vaguely hostile glances from those surrounding him, but the woman at the bar seemed oblivious. He finally managed to reach her side and sit down. "Janine, am I glad to see you! Why didn't you answer when I called?"

She turned to look at him, arching an inquisitive eyebrow. "Are you addressing me?"

"Don't you remember? Detective Darien Lambert, Washington, D.C., you helped me and my partner on the Keller investigation. It was about five years ago—relatively speaking, of course. You made quite an impression on me, Janine."

She shook her head slightly. He noticed her earrings swaying with the motion, two identical miniature black roses,

complete with thorns. "I never forget a face...Darien? Especially one as memorable as yours." She licked her lips.

Maybe the lights were affecting his mind, but he was extremely confused. She looked like Janine. She had the same voice and the same accent. The same glorious figure. Why was she pretending not to know him? Did she think he would blow her cover? "Listen, Janine, I don't know what game you're playing, but my old partner Mace is in trouble and needs our help. Unless you're about to capture Dr. Sahmbi himself, this takes priority."

Just then Schanke pushed his way through to them. "There you are, Lambert. I see you found Janette, proprietress of this lovely establishment." He chuckled.

Janette sniffed and turned back to Darien. A goblet of red wine had appeared in her hand. "As you can see, my name is not Janine. However..." She paused to sip her drink. "You mentioned Mace. Exactly how much trouble is he in?"

"He vanished after having his pocket picked last night a few blocks from this building. I believe he may be injured, and that there is a homicidal fugitive out for his blood."

Janette took another sip from her glass. "The fugitive has good taste."

"Wait a minute," Schanke cut in. "You know Officer Warfield, Janette?"

"Let us just say that he is one of my...special guests." She pouted. "He left rather abruptly last night. I recall hoping, for his sake, that he had a *very* good excuse."

"So he *was* here. Do you know where he is now?"

She lifted her shoulders in a graceful shrug. "I really have no idea."

"Well, thank you for your time, Jani—Janette," Darien corrected himself. "If you hear from him, contact us right away. Um, is there a phone around here I could use?"

She pointed. Schanke left to bring the car around. Once safely holding the receiver, Darien was free to talk to his computer. "SELMA, what's going on here? Why does she look exactly like Janine?"

"Voice analysis reveals that she *is* Officer Nichols, Captain. You were not mistaken. However, the stability of her stress level indicates that she also did not lie to you. I cannot satisfactorily reconcile the two facts."

"It's almost as though she were meeting me for the first time—but that's impossible! I met her in 2189, long before I learned about the TRAX project, before I even met you. Could it be amnesia? A side effect of temportation?"

"Unknown, Captain."

He sighed. "All right. Can you extrapolate where Mace might have gone after leaving the club?"

"Janette said that he left abruptly. You have often stated yourself that he is impetuous. If he recognized a fugitive exiting the Raven, he may have taken off in pursuit without considering the consequences."

"The same fugitive who killed the pickpocket and ran when he heard sirens. Mace wouldn't give up—he would do anything to take down his quarry, injured or not. Find the fugitive, and we find Mace."

"How do you plan to accomplish that, Captain?"

"First I need to locate a place to spend the night. I'll think of a plan in the morning."

From her seat at the bar, Janette eavesdropped on his conversation. Slowly, she smiled.

Darien awoke early the next morning to the sound of an insistently ringing telephone. He was tempted to ask SELMA to take a message, but he knew better. He managed to haul himself out of bed and grab the hotel phone. "Hello? Lambert here."

"This is Detective Schanke. I figured you'd want to hear the latest news on the case."

"Go ahead, I'm listening."

"The girl we arrested for killing John D. Pickpocket turned out to be innocent. Nick is going to attempt to smoke out your fugitive by using her as bait. Nat's taking her home from the hospital this evening."

"Thanks for the update."

"No problem, glad to help. Let me know tonight if you make any progress toward finding your friend."

"I'll do that. Bye." No sooner had he hung up the phone than there was a knock at the door. "Now who—?" The call had awakened him sufficiently to allow him to pull on jeans and a sweatshirt in a reasonable amount of time. He opened the door, not knowing quite what to expect.

Mace stood outside, appearing haggard and tired but still grinning broadly. "Rise and shine, Dare! Long time no see." He pulled his ex-partner into an exuberant bear hug, complete with back-pounding and inarticulate expressions of greeting.

Pam Wittenberg '65

"Mace! What happened to you? How did you find me here?"

"Long story, easy answer. I followed you."

"*You* followed *me?*"

"Yeah, from the Raven. I was watching the place, hoping Graham would show up, and you walked right in."

"Graham is a fugitive?"

"Yep. I thought I'd give you an assist."

Darien struggled hard to keep his exasperation in check. "Mace, what were you going to do with him if you caught him? You don't have any TXP! You couldn't send him back."

Mace shrugged, unfazed. "I'd've thought of something."

Darien groaned. "Never mind. Just tell me what happened to you night before last."

Mace had the decency to look sheepish. "I was robbed."

"I *know* that. Why do you think I came here? Dammit, Mace, I thought you were dead."

That gave the other man pause. "Dead? Sure, I was knocked unconscious for a few minutes, but dead?"

Wearily, Darien told him the whole story, from the time SELMA found out about the homicide to the present. "Wow," was all the response Mace could give.

"Exactly. Now the police have CINDI, Graham has been alerted to your presence, and—"

"Hey, hey, amigo, calm down." He made placating gestures. "It's not so bad. Look, they'll have to return CINDI to me, since she's mine, and Janette has an 'in' with the police, she'll help us out. I bet she can even get us access to Graham, once the police nab him."

"Great. Let's go talk to her."

"Oh, not right now."

Darien took several deep breaths. Perspective. He had to have perspective. A few short hours ago he was grieving over his friend...he shouldn't be fantasizing about wielding the knife himself. "Why not?"

"Janette is something of a night person."

Darien threw his hands up in surrender. "That's it. I've had enough. I'm sending you back. You have been nothing but trouble from the first time I set eyes on you. You've gotten me into the middle of a mess I didn't need, and your actions have been completely irresponsible." He turned toward the night stand on which he had left his PP.

Mace crossed his arms over his chest. "Now tell me how you really feel."

Darien halted like a man poleaxed. He stood frozen for several moments, then sank slowly into one of the hotel chairs and rested his head in his hand. "I blamed myself. If I had sent you back in the first place, as I should have, you wouldn't have died. My mistake cost you your life."

"Oh?"

"I couldn't stop thinking about the cases we'd worked together and how much I would miss knowing you were out there somewhere. Despite being such a pain, you're a good friend, and I don't want to lose that."

"Me neither, partner. Me neither."

Janette looked up as they entered the club. She had been anticipating Darien's arrival for quite a while, and it came as no surprise that he had caught up with Mace. The two made a very luscious pair, she had to admit. Dark-haired, in excellent physical condition, and with eyes that could melt a woman to a boneless puddle. Such a shame their beauty would be all too fleeting.

She had had plenty of time to ponder that overheard snippet of Darien's "telephone" conversation. *Temportation.* An unfamiliar word, but one she had little trouble deciphering. Travel through time. That date he had mentioned, 2189, was two hundred years in the future.

Or, perhaps, five years in his past?

The concept was fascinating in its complexity. Could this be proof that she would still be alive two centuries hence? Did he possibly remember facts about her that hadn't yet occurred? If so, were those facts etched in stone, or could she alter her destiny and render his memories invalid?

Would she actually become a *policewoman?* She shuddered at the thought.

So far he did not suspect her true role in his memories, yet she knew a great deal about him from what he had let slip. How could she use this knowledge to her advantage? He already had preconceptions about her—should she play into them?

She had briefly considered the notion that he existed in his own private fantasy world, but dismissed it. Too many things pointed the other way. His heart rate, for instance, was incredibly low compared to normal mortals. The voice with which he had conversed came not from the telephone, as he pretended, but from elsewhere on his person.

Phrases Mace used out of habit that made no sense within a modern milieu could very well indicate a futuristic origin. She was not so closed-minded that she would ignore such a unique opportunity.

"Welcome, gentlemen. I must say, I expected you earlier."

Darien sat down on her right. Mace, after a quick peck on the cheek, took the seat on her left. "I was delayed getting my belongings back from the police."

"Ah, yes, I had heard that you were robbed the other—" She halted in the middle of her sentence and cocked her head. Gunshots? Not loud enough for a mortal to notice, especially over the din inside the club, but still, so close to the Raven? At the same time she heard a short series of staccato notes emanating from the vicinity of Darien's pocket. Coincidence? Probably not.

"My beeper," Darien explained. "May I use your phone?"

Her suspicions confirmed, Janette held up a hand to restrain him. "No need for the charade. I know you intend to speak to your friend the disembodied voice, as you did on your last visit." She enjoyed seeing his eyes widen in astonishment. "If I am not mistaken," she added, "it is about to warn you that shots have been fired not too far from here."

Darien continued to stare at her as he said, "Go ahead, SELMA."

"Officer Nichols is correct, Captain." Her synthesized voice held overtones of awe.

"Officer who?" Mace scrutinized the woman next to him. "*Janine* Nichols? Hot damn, it *is* you! No wonder you seemed so familiar. The three of us working together to capture a fugitive—it's just like old times."

"If I may interrupt," SELMA cut in with her customary politeness. "I have pinpointed the location of the gunshots, and they are within five meters of where the police found the pickpocket's body."

"The shots have ceased," Janette announced.

Darien added his two cents to the conversation. "Perhaps we'd better go check it out." He stood up. "Mace?"

"I'm with you, partner." He leapt to his feet.

Janette did the same, albeit with infinitely more grace. "I, as well."

"Are you sure? It could be dangerous," Mace warned. Concerned for her safety, no doubt. How ironic.

"As you said. It will be just like old times."

The adventurous trio arrived at the scene of the crime just as Nick was pushing a man into his car. "Is that Graham?" Darien asked his ex-partner.

Mace slammed a fist into his left palm. "Sure is, amigo. That is one *mean* dude. Well, Dare, now's your chance to do what you do best. Send him back."

Darien rolled his eyes. "Discretion, Mace? Ever heard of it?"

Nick closed the car door and turned to face them. "Janette, what are you doing here?"

"I could ask the same of you, Nicola. This is my neighborhood."

Nick indicated the man in the car. "He very nearly shot Natalie a few minutes ago. Luckily, I was close enough to be of help."

"He missed? What a pity." She smiled to take the venom out of her words. She didn't want to upset him further when he was already distraught.

The cop with the invisible sidekick stuck out his hand. "You must be Detective Knight. Your partner mentioned you. I'm Darien Lambert—"

Mace jumped in with his characteristic forthrightness. "—And we'll be taking the fugitive now. Don't worry, Knight, he'll never bother you again."

Nick's expression hardened. "What's this all about?"

Janette sighed. "Excuse us, gentlemen." She took Nick by the arm and led him out of the mortals' earshot, yet still within easy reach in case Mace tried something foolish. "There is something you should know. They are not ordinary police officers."

"What are they? Government?"

"Not at all. No, they are—I know how this sounds, Nicola—they are from the future. Two centuries in the future. And they have met me there."

He laughed. "I must admit, that's quite original. You surprise me, Janette."

"I'm serious!" she hissed, put out that he didn't trust her word. "The man who tried to kill your Natalie is a fugitive from their time. They must send him back."

"Why should I believe this wild tale?"

She stood, fuming silently, for a few moments. Finally she made up her mind. "If I offer you proof, will you turn over the captive?"

"Proof?" He considered. At one time he would have thought vampires nothing but myth. Why not give police from the future a chance? "Very well. I agree to your bargain."

She smiled triumphantly and strode back to the two mortals. "Darien," she asked, "did I ever tell you why I became a cop?"

Nick nearly burst into helpless laughter again, but she quelled him with a glance and he managed to restrain himself. Darien watched their interaction, confused. "Yes, but I don't see what—"

"Please relate the story for Nicola. He is very interested."

Darien shrugged, but gave in to her request. "You said you joined the force in memory of your brother. You wanted to do your part to protect the descendants he never lived to see." He paused. "It was right after you took that laser pulse meant for me."

She gasped, not expecting such a revelation. She regained her composure swiftly, at least on the outside. *In memory of my brother,* she thought, knowing of only one person she would refer to as such.

Nick made no attempt to conceal his reaction. He staggered back against the car, eyes wide. The news of his impending demise, however, was not the cause, as it would have been for Janette. The implications of the second statement hit him the hardest. "Descendants?" he whispered.

He took one hesitant step forward, and then another, until he could clasp Darien's shoulders. He searched the future cop's face with single-minded intensity. Evidently he found what he sought, for he released his grip and turned away. "Take him...Lambert. He is yours."

"Are you certain this is what you want?"

"Take him."

The transfer of the prisoner proceeded without difficulty, especially with Mace supervising, cheerfully threatening what he would do should Graham not cooperate. Nick and Janette watched them go, each lost in private thoughts.

She broke the silence first. "I'm sorry, Nicola. I didn't know what he would say."

His gaze followed the retreating mortals, eyes glowing with an inner light that had no connection to his vampire nature. "Thank you."

"For what?"

"For saving his life."

"Well...." She reached out and brushed her fingertips across his cheek. "What is one laser pulse, more or less, for old times' sake?"

94.12

Rasslin'

by Jenny Hayward

The bar was the brawling kind, where beer and biceps were the order of the day. At a table near the bar, Big Bob had a standing bet that nobody could beat him at arm-wrestling, and there were enough transients passing through that it kept the locals entertained. Rumors of odd goings-on, whether ghosts or bigfoot or straightforward villainy, seemed to attract a reporter or two, but they were easily spotted, and they never had the muscles to go against Big Bob.

"You want some answers," said a regular to the stranger, "you gotta go against Big Bob first." And be a good loser, was the unspoken thought.

The man eyed Big Bob, tall, bulging muscles and a thick neck. He himself was ruggedly handsome, short brown hair, and the kind of posture that said ex-military. He smiled slowly. "Guess I'll just have to go against Bob, then," he said, and went over to Bob's table.

The locals bestirred themselves to look, expecting a quick contest. The stranger had some muscles, sure, but nothing to compare to Bob's.

They were both right and wrong. The contest was short, but Bob didn't win it. The stranger had Bob's arm down five seconds after the mark. They could barely take it in. They demanded he do it again.

He did it again. This time he humored them; he took ten seconds.

Bob paid him up and pounded him good-naturedly on the back. The stranger was about to return to his seat when another transient came up.

"Would you mind if we had a contest?" he said to the man who had just beaten Bob. He too was handsome enough, with dark, almost black hair, finer features and a slighter build which had 'reporter' written all over him.

"You don't want to try Bob first?" the winner asked, eyeing the slim man sardonically.

"It wouldn't be fair on Bob," he replied with a gleam in his eye, "to lose twice in a row."

The other laughed. "Or maybe you just don't want to lose twice in a row."

Bob butted in. "Put your money where your mouth is, Mister." He put up his arm on the table.

The dark-haired man shrugged and sat down in front of Bob. "It's your funeral." He choreographed his moves; he downed Bob stylishly in thirty seconds.

The patrons laughed, Bob grumbled, the rugged man raised his eyebrows and the dark-haired man merely shrugged.

A table was quickly cleared, and the patrons gathered around for what looked to be an interesting contest. The two men sat down eyeing each other. Interestingly enough, a similar thought was going through both their minds: this guy is strong; still, I don't want to exert so much strength that I break his arm...

The mark was given. Their arms tensed, swayed, and held firm. And held firm. Over their gripping hands, they stared at each other.

The dark-haired one frowned. "Your face is familiar. Have we met?"

"I doubt it," came the reply.

"I never forget a face," the dark-haired man said.

Their hands wobbled briefly, as first one, then the other, exerted himself to greater effort. "Austin," declared the dark-haired man. "You're Steven Austin. The astronaut."

Steve Austin inclined his head. "You do have a good memory for faces. Now that you know my name, might I know yours?"

The dark-haired man grinned. "If you beat me," he said, and exerted his muscles even more, sweating with effort, but Austin's arm was as steady as a gyroscope. He's not even breathing heavily, he thought. What is this Austin made of? Then he heard it: the whirring of the motors, the clicking of the relays. Austin had an artificial arm!

The surprise was enough to slacken his concentration. Austin pressed his advantage, and slowly, slowly pressed his opponent's arm to the table.

"So what's your name?" asked Steve Austin, the six million dollar man.

"Sterling," replied the dark-haired man. "Craig Sterling." Who, when he had crash-landed in the Himalayas with two others, had been given amazing powers by a lost civilization. He massaged his hand. "That's a very good arm you've got. Do they come in assorted colors?"

Steve Austin froze. Who was Sterling? Was he bionic too?

"You don't get away that easy," Craig grinned. "Other arm." He had a hunch that the other arm did not sport the same enhancements as the right one.

"I don't wrestle left-handed," Steve declared, stony-faced.

"Aw, give him the other arm!" cried a local, and there was a murmur of agreement all round.

Frowning, Steve complied. Craig, with a twinkle in his eye, downed him in thirty seconds.

"Now we're even," he said. "Let me buy you a drink."

The Double Image Affair

by Gina Martin

The San Luca Clinic was enclosed by a stiffly manicured landscape, similar to any other mental hospital anywhere in the country. The horticulture barrier lent the fabricated impression of outward serenity; a showy facade to cover the anxious turmoil within.

Pleased with the astute analogy, General Hunt Stockwell, Ret., felt slightly more at ease. A veteran of combat and numerous covert missions, he was embarrassed to admit, even to himself, that mental clinics unnerved him. That he shared the unease with the majority of other *normal* people was no comfort. Being grouped with the masses was an insult to his independent nature.

This was his third visit to the sanitarium. The recollection brought enough irritation to wash away his nervousness. He hated to lose control of any situation, but, like the excellent tactician he was, he knew when to retreat, regroup, and accept what he could not change.

Life with the A-Team had taught him a measure of tolerance. Hunt had learned a new definition of flexibility, and his need for control had altered, since. The best he could hope for usually was simply to direct the course of the maverick team.

As Stockwell walked the sickeningly sterile corridors, he sighed in self-pity. He had *enlisted* the services of the free-styled A-Team—complete with personal idiosyncrasies. In some form of bizarre self-punishment, he felt obligated to personally see to these little problems instigated by his most—unique—operative.

The orderly led Hunt to the doorway of a large verandah open to patients during the day. The bright sunlight and fresh air seemed a depressing reminder of an outside world where these listless people were no longer included. Stockwell couldn't repress a pang of regret that Murdock might never sever the ties to these institutions. Hunt had developed a guarded fondness for Murdock. Although the vet was still considered legally insane, he was a tremendous asset to operations, and, at times, displayed an eerie sense of reason.

Hunt scanned the patients for the familiar flight jacket and baseball cap....

Suddenly, Stockwell's heart seemed to stop. Only the automatic instinct of tightly controlled emotions restrained the gasp of surprise that caught in his throat. He had to force himself to breathe again as he stared at the two men at the corner of the patio.

Murdock sat on a bench near the verandah railing. Next to him was a pale man who seemed almost trance-like with detachment. The pallor of the skin was magnified by the deep-set hardship lines that scored the face. Still, no tragedy, or span of time, could significantly change that terribly familiar face framed with blond hair. Stockwell would never fail to recognize the only man he had ever called his best friend.

"Ivan," he whispered in a hoarse, shaky voice.

Then reason returned. The man on the balcony *could not* be his former partner. Surely, Hunt would have heard of anything this drastic happening to his old friend.

An orderly explained the patient's tragic history. The man was a Russian named Kuryakin. A former intelligence agent with some unspecified international organization, who had cracked after a mission. Murdock, knowing some Russian, courtesy of his stint in 'Nam, had befriended the withdrawn Kuryakin. *Murdock was the type to adopt strays,* he thought

Stockwell was not inclined to learn more, already unaccountably depressed to discover so much about this haunting look-alike of his friend Ivan Trigorin. A mixture of relief and empathy tingled his taut nerves: relief the pale man was someone besides Trigorin, pity and empathy that this was the tragic end of the road for a once active operative.

Although Hunt and Ivan had not spoken in many years, for both professional and personal reasons, Stockwell still kept track of the whereabouts of his old partner. Now a successful mercenary, Ivan had been pegged at his country home in Kent only two months ago.

Hunt wondered if some kind of twisted fate had brought him here; had drawn Murdock and him to this eerie place and time, to meet this haunting twin who was some strange, distorted reflection of Ivan. It was said everyone had a double somewhere in the world, but this was almost unbelievable. Hunt was struck by the palpable tragedy surrounding this pathetic, silent parallel. Not Ivan; but how easily it could have been Trigorin, or Stockwell, reduced to a mindless shell. So many times the risks of intelligence work took agents to the edge of sanity. That last mission in Cuba—Ivan seemed to have been teetering on the breaking point.

Mustering his fluctuating courage, Stockwell walked into the warm California sunshine and slowly approached this ghost-double from his past. He continued his transfixed stare of fascination at the pale Russian. Abstractly, he noted that Murdock wore a T-shirt that said *You are now entering the Twilight Zone.* Stockwell mentally smiled with rueful acknowledgment of the vagaries of fate.

Murdock was haltingly conversing in Russian. Hunt's comprehension of the language was a bit rusty and he could only follow pieces of the conversation. He said something

about the University of Georgia in the Ukraine? His Russian must be worse than he thought.

Hunt was suddenly overwhelmed by the desire to see Ivan again. They had been apart too long; differences in ideology, and jagged memories of the traumatic end of their partnership, old wounds never healed, had kept them separated for years. Those differences seemed inconsequential as he faced the despondent Kuryakin. Now a pathetic picture of broken humanity, this displaced Russian soul once had been an operative. Someone's partner?—as Ivan had always been Hunt's other half? Stockwell shivered, doubting he had the strength to discover what had happened to break this man; what dark nightmare haunted the history of this former spy.

Murdock glanced up and smiled at his employer. "General, I'm glad you're here," he greeted warmly as he stood and took Stockwell by the arm.

Kuryakin seemed oblivious to the new arrival and stared across the grounds with an eerily vacant expression. "Illya will be happy to meet someone else who speaks Russian," Murdock explained, though there was still no visible reaction from the man.

"My Russian isn't very good," Stockwell offered.

Murdock ignored the excuse and tugged Stockwell over to stand beside Kuryakin. "Doesn't matter, General. Illya hasn't spoken English for three years."

"Illya," Hunt whispered, testing the name so close to Ivan's.

Murdock sat on the railing of the balcony, his back against the protective wrought-iron fencing. He was only inches from Kuryakin. "Illya, I brought a friend to talk to you. He speaks Russian."

Beyond further shock, Stockwell accepted this label of comrade from Murdock. "Illya Kuryakin, this is General Stockwell," was the formally intoned introduction.

Acutely uncomfortable, but determined not to show it, Stockwell crouched down to eye level with the stranger. He could feel a tangible barrier of isolation around Kuryakin. The Russian did not accept intruders into the private hell trapping the altered mind. Untrusting, guarded, suspicious; traits this silent man shared with his look-alike Trigorin.

The comparison to his friend was inescapable. Unbidden, the response was automatic. He offered a fond greeting from a long buried past.

"Do zvidániya, tovarisch."

The blond head snapped around instantly. Eyes as blue as the sky were clouded with a deep horror, backdropped by a haunting pain, and pierced Stockwell to his heart. He wanted to turn away, but found himself unable to deny the disturbing probe. So hauntingly like Ivan's were these blue eyes; windows to a soul temporarily resurrected from desperation—longing—from a slow and agonizing death.

With delicate hesitation, Kuryakin stretched a pale hand to Hunt's shoulder; touched the arm, testing to see if this was apparition or reality.

"Napoleon?" The tremulous question was whispered with all the doubt and pain sequestered behind the vulnerable, pale face. "Are you real?" Amazement conquered the cracked voice. An inarticulate noise caught in his throat. Without warning, he launched himself at Stockwell, clinging to the General with the desperate fervor of a dying man seizing a lifeline.

For a moment, Hunt was immobile from shock. Then he hesitantly wrapped his arms around the trembling, weeping Russian. It seemed too bizarre that Ivan's look-alike mistook Stockwell for someone else—someone called Napoleon. Reason had no reference in this strange, altered reality he had entered.

"I thought I had killed you," was Kuryakin's explanation between shuddered sobs.

Automatically, Stockwell gently placed a hand on the straw-colored hair and tried to calm the shaking man. He responded on an instinctive level to the raw, tortured emotions of Kuryakin because, in too many respects, Illya *was* Ivan Trigorin. Just as Kuryakin longed for this reunion to be real, in his own way Hunt wished this was a real reunion with Ivan.

Finally the sobs subsided and Kuryakin's grip loosened.

"Napoleon, how did you..." the voice trailed away. Kuryakin pulled back to scrutinize Stockwell's face.

Sudden confusion filled the tear-streaked face. The achingly open vulnerability was instantly masked by suspicion. Wary, astute blue eyes probed sympathetic brown eyes now discovered to belong to an interloper.

"Napoleon?" Kuryakin whispered and pushed away from Hunt.

Stockwell remained still. He did not flinch when Kuryakin rushed unsteady fingers on his chin. "No scar," Kuryakin accused and retreated against the iron rail. "A THRUSH impostor! What did you do with Napoleon?" Then with surprising suddenness his eyes cleared to frighteningly sharp lucidity. The voice was calm, almost hollow in its lack of emotion. The face was placid but drained of color. "Of course you're not Napoleon," was the reasonable comment. "I killed you, Napoleon." Confusion flitted across the face, then was quickly replaced by an expression of clear comprehension. The blue eyes lanced through

Hunt to some unknown point of infinity as Kuryakin whispered, "I'm coming, my old friend."

Without warning, the deceptively agile man launched himself onto the wrought-iron railing.

Hunt caught onto a thin wrist. "Illya—NO!"

The grip stopped the Russian's forward momentum.

"Illya—you mustn't leave. I'm not Napoleon, but I know he's coming for you. You must wait for him." The blue eyes ached with the pain of former betrayal, but were haunted with the empty hope of faith—the desire to believe. "You must wait," Hunt urged.

The Russian allowed the others to assist him back to the balcony. He kept a wary eye on Stockwell as he was escorted back inside by an attendant.

Stockwell pulled his eyes from the monitor. He and Murdock were alone in Stockwell's private office aboard the General's jet. Their attention was on the picture on the computer monitor. It was a black and white photo of a young Illya Kuryakin and a man who bore a remarkable resemblance to Stockwell.

"Illya and Napoleon?" Murdock questioned.

Stockwell nodded and looked away from the screen. It was disturbing to see the twins of Ivan and himself on the monitor. It was sadly depressing to know the history of these two agents with whom Hunt felt an almost psychic link. Kuryakin and Napoleon were too close to another Russian/American team.

With an almost physical ache, Hunt was reminded that Ivan had returned none of his calls. He was almost desperate to renew their contact again.

The computer read-out explained that Illya Kuryakin and his American partner, Napoleon Solo, had been UNCLE agents. On a mission three years before, Solo had infiltrated a THRUSH (a now extinct criminal organization) base where Kuryakin was a prisoner. The Russian had escaped and set the fatal explosives that destroyed the complex. Solo was officially listed as killed in action, although no body was ever found. When the Russian discovered he had inadvertently killed his partner, he retreated into shock and forged a self-induced mental prison.

Stockwell glanced at the screen, then quickly turned away. "When Kuryakin saw me..." he sighed heavily.

"It wasn't your fault, General," Murdock offered quietly.

Stockwell shifted uncomfortably, unsure how to handle this; first, Murdock's acceptance, now, his understanding and comfort. Hunt nervously fingered the papers on the desk. "I pushed him over the edge, Murdock."

"Not you," Murdock firmly maintained. "Napoleon Solo. A ghost Illya can never escape."

Hunt glanced up at Murdock. Having spent many years running from the lingering wraiths of Vietnam, Murdock knew all about mental hauntings. Hunt owned his own spooks from the past.

"Thank you. In this business there are too many ghosts." Hunt snapped off the monitor and stared at the empty screen.

"We are all reflections of each other," Murdock quietly philosophized. "But each reflection is different." He studied the silent general for several minutes. "You understood Illya. Did you know him?"

"I know his double." Hunt's response was an echo of the emptiness he felt; a blurred reflection of the hollow ache Kuryakin had known. "I had a partner once, too." Murdock rested a hand on Stockwell's shoulder, a silent message of a shared understanding.

"Do you think Napoleon could be alive?"

"After three years?" Murdock shook his head, then stopped. His face took on an expression of wonderment. "You don't think—?"

"I don't know. Isn't it worth a try to find an old friend?" Murdock thought he was speaking of the UNCLE agents, but Hunt was thinking of his own Russian soul-mate who was somewhere on the globe.

After Murdock left, Stockwell placed some calls to high-level intelligence sources. He found out that several expatriate THRUSH agents had survived the destruction of the base and were working as terrorists in the Middle East and Asia. There was even a rumor of an American agent being held prisoner in Cambodia. If Napoleon Solo had, somehow, miraculously survived that explosion, Stockwell would know about it very shortly. Even if the unknown American was not Solo, Stockwell would organize the A-Team for a rescue. Now that he had a possible identification, he felt justified in risking the rescue operation. If the agent was Solo, then there would be at least one happy epilogue in this covert, shadowy war.

Then, he placed some calls to Ivan Trigorin's European contacts. He would continue to search for Ivan until his errant Russian returned the calls. Ostensibly, it was to offer his old friend a spot on his intelligence team. In reality, he simply wanted to see his Ivan again.

If this incident with Kuryakin had taught him nothing else, he had learned to take advantage of second chances.

Stockwell could understand the agonies of the loss of someone irreplaceable; a friend was more important than national boundaries, ideologies and political stubbornness. He had been a fool to let his own stuffy attitude allow Ivan to walk out of his life those long years ago after Cuba. It was time to mend fences. Pride, bitterness and broken commitments had separated them for far too long. He wanted to see Ivan again before it was too late. It might be too late for Kuryakin and Solo. Hunt did not want that to happen to his partnership. He would keep trying to contact Ivan, no matter how long it took for the Russian to respond. After more than twenty years, he had a lot to say. After all that time, he could wait a few more days for an answer.

Hunt Stockwell was a man who understood how to utilize every resource to his advantage. His vast intelligence network covered the globe, and there was hardly a nook in any country that was too remote for his various and sundry operatives. At the end of the week he had come up short at two dead ends. One was the information on possible American prisoners being held in Asia The second was the wall of silence from Ivan Trigorin. Neither was an insurmountable problem. The first, was being sorted through by his staff; the second, would be settled in person.

He pulled his rented Mercedes to a stop at the gates of a palatial manor set against the lush green hills of Devon. The country estate in the south of England was ancient and dignified, and seemed displaced from a calendar-perfect photo. The security fences and gates indicated it was also equipped with the latest security technology. Something to be expected from a former spy.

Hunt gave his name to the intercom and waited patiently while the video camera scanned him. Several minutes later the gate automatically unlocked and swung open. He drove up to the Tudor-styled front entrance, where he was met by a butler and an armed security man. With professional precision he was frisked and ushered into the manor house.

He was given tea in a sitting room decorated with Georgian antiques, where he stayed close to the blazing fire which dispelled the seeping cold of the ancient pile of stone. He studied the various bladed weapons hung above the mantle. Old deaths. It seemed a fitting decor for his old friend. There was a great deal of blood and violence in the Russian/English heritage of Ivan—the offspring of an expatriate Czarist who had made a home with the blue-bloods of London. Pride of heritage. Pride could be a double-edged sword. Ivan's had been mortally wounded in Cuba. It had driven him away from the CIA, from Hunt. Hunt stared into the flames; their flickering orange flares were mesmerizing. For the thousandth time, he wondered what he could offer to coax his friend back from self-exile. He wondered if Ivan would even meet him today. The Russian had not answered any messages, why would he agree to a face-to-face meeting with his old colleague? Stockwell brought with him all the old memories of their last terrible meeting. What positive offering could he give?

"Contemplating a duel at dawn, Hunt?"

The general spun from the hearth. Just the sight of his old friend brought an automatic smile. Warm affection colored his tone. "Ivan!"

In a few strides he crossed the room and hugged his old friend. It was as if the sands of time whipped backward, as if no years had passed since they had been inseparable partners. He leaned back and studied his friend, still clinging to the Russian's shoulders. Ivan had changed little in the last decades; a few more lines, a bit of grey dusting the blond hair at the temples, but very much the same. So much like Illya Kuryakin. Even to the crisp blue eyes that, even in Ivan, were shaded by hidden terrors. Ghosts lingered for most spies; for Trigorin and Kuryakin, the hauntings were too deep.

"The years have years have treated you well, old friend. You've hardly changed," Stockwell marveled as he pushed Ivan to arm's length and studied his former colleague "You look very well."

"Life is good here," was Trigorin's cryptic response. He ran a critical eye over his friend. "You look like an agent who's spent too long in the cold."

"It's the game I've chosen to play."

Ivan disengaged from the contact and went to a sideboard to pour drinks. "What brings you here?" His tone was wary.

Hunt walked to one of the windows and observed the bucolic countryside rolling down a gentle slope from the house. Meadows stretched down to a wooded area to the south. To the north were some old stone walls dividing fields where some kind of animals grazed. A stream ambled through the farthest pasture.

It was a long way from the grime and blood of espionage. After the terrible debacle of the Bay of Pigs, Ivan had escaped from the terrors of the spy business. Hunt had rarely talked to him since because there was too much hurt between them. Trigorin would never go back to the Game and Hunt would never leave it alive. Reunions between two men, once so close, could only be painful reminders of what they had once shared and what they had lost. The gulf would be too wide, too hurtful, to bridge. Trigorin had refused to respond to his calls because he was not ready to face his old friend. That he had agreed to this spontaneous meeting was a sign Ivan was at least willing to listen. Perhaps, he too ached for contact again, just as Hunt did.

"I need your help with something unofficial. I know you have contacts in vast areas of the world. I could use some information."

Since their separation, Trigorin had made a fortune in eclectic areas of expertise. One career was as an author and lecturer on scientific theories. The covert community knew him as a world-wide information source. No longer out in the field himself, he had informants everywhere. He bought and sold intelligence to whoever had the money. Every organization in the world mistrusted him, but still occasionally used his resources. This was the first time Hunt had utilized his friend's information network.

Trigorin joined him at the window and handed him a glass. "General-*by-the-book*-Stockwell wants my help?" was his sarcastic, rhetorical reply. "I think I need a stronger drink."

"It's unofficial."

From an inside jacket pocket, Hunt pulled out some folded papers and handed them to Ivan. It was the complete dossier available on Kuryakin and Solo. Trigorin studied them in silence. He drew in a sharp breath when he came to the pictures of the two former UNCLE agents. He glanced at Hunt for a moment. His blue eyes clouded.

"I see your interest"

"Spooky, isn't it?"

"Very." The voice trembled slightly. The eyes shaded with fear. The same fear Hunt had felt when he thought how easily this wretched story could be theirs instead of Kuryakin's and Solo's. He returned the papers to Hunt and walked to the fireplace, his back to his old friend. "What do you want from me?"

"Isn't it obvious?"

"No."

Even after all these years, Hunt recognized the obstinate tone. The Russian could be so stubborn. He could hurt so deeply as well. Stockwell's return was hard enough, but bringing along these tragic ghosts of Solo and Kuryakin was too much. He had to get around Ivan's fear, his refusal to face the past and present.

"I want to find Solo."

"He's reported as dead."

"No body."

Trigorin shook his head negatively. "It's none of our business."

Hunt sighed and looked out at the pastoral beauty of the countryside-prison. There were invisible walls surrounding the estate—walls to keep the past out. He had intruded by scaling those bastions. His intrusion had brought pain and unresolved problems. He had nothing to lose by pressing his suit to the limit.

"That's what we were taught for survival. We know some things are personal."

"Not to me."

Stockwell ignored the lie. "I can't turn my back on this, Ivan. It's too close. I hoped you would feel the same. You do, but you're too afraid to admit it. I just wish I knew what that fear was."

"You mistake your own sentiments with my selfish isolationism," was Trigorin's crisp response. "A dangerous mistake, Hunt. Spies cannot risk sentiment or emotions."

We did once, was his sad, silent reply. Trigorin could not get beyond the pain of their last mission, nor could he forget the close partnership they once shared. Hunt should have known something this close to home would send Ivan deeper into hiding rather than bring him out. He was getting too sentimental in his old age.

"I want only information. I'm not asking you to go on an assignment with me!" The words were sharper and harsher than he had intended.

"I do not want to be involved. There is nothing more I have to say to you."

Stockwell put the glass down on a table. He hesitated, then put the papers, as well. Maybe Ivan's curiosity would get the better of him. More likely the papers would be tossed in the fire as soon as he left. He didn't know what he had expected from this meeting, but he was leaving feeling more disappointed and depressed than he had felt in a long time.

"Good-bye, Ivan."

"The butler will see you out."

Hunt hesitated for a few seconds, wanting to say so much more, knowing he would probably never have another opportunity to clear the air between them. He studied the stiff back of his old friend. Ivan didn't want to hear anything he had to say. Without another comment, Stockwell left the room.

Stockwell's jet was winging toward the States later that night. Coordinating covert activities around the world kept him tied to his desk and phone. He was nearly ready for bed, when another call came through.

"Stockwell."

"I have a lead for you on Napoleon Solo."

Hunt breathed in sharply. "Ivan!

"You are a crafty wolf, Hunt. Leaving the papers was unfair."

"I've always warned you about your deplorable curiosity," the General smiled.

"THRUSH disbanded years ago, but a few of their agents have strayed across my path. Solo was rumored to be captured, not killed, after the explosion. He was sent to some THRUSH renegades hiding behind the Iron Curtain. That is all I have now. I will send more in the next few days."

"Thank you, Ivan."

"Don't. This is against my better judgement. You will probably personally oversee some foolhardy rescue operation and get yourself killed. At best, you will find Solo long dead, or in worse condition than his partner if he is alive. Almost three years of captivity..." his words were swallowed in silent terrors. "We know what has happened to the POW's left in Southeast Asia."

Hunt had thought of those dire possibilities already. He would worry about them when he had to. "Let's just see if you can find him first," he advised. "And thanks, anyway."

"You are not welcome."

"Ivan."

"Yes?"

"It was good to see you again."

The connection broke.

Hunt sighed and replaced the receiver. Neither the information nor the meet with Trigorin was much, but it was something. Perhaps, on both counts, there would be more in the future.

General Stockwell?"

It was the A-Team's Hannibal Smith. Thirteen hours before, the A-Team had disappeared behind the hostile lines of Communist Cambodia. Because of his top-line status in the intelligence community, it would have been ridiculous for Stockwell to go himself. It was not a mission he wanted to personally oversee, despite what Ivan had thought. Hunt had acted on the information Trigorin had supplied, but did not want to see Solo after years as a prisoner in a labor camp. Hunt did not want to see any of the other five former UNCLE, MI6, and CIA agents who had been given to the Communists when THRUSH had dissolved. He did not want to get any closer, any more personal, to this case. He would handle the reins from a distance.

"Yes, Smith. Go ahead."

"Mission accomplished. We are en route to Honolulu now."

The prisoners were taken to a U.S. base under top secret conditions. The rescue, the return of these poor souls, would never be publicized. They would quietly return to their families and the real world after appropriate debriefings. Stockwell didn't want to think about the detraining much, either. If there was much left of mind and body to *declassify*. It was not his concern anymore. He had done all he could.

"All prisoners accounted for?"

"All five on your list, and three POW's, I'm happy to say."

"Good news. Thank you, Smith. Pass that along to your team. You can all take some time off for awhile."

"Will do. Murdock wants to know if you're meeting us in Hawaii."

"No."

There was a pause. No doubt the abrupt reply was a surprise to the men he had sent into the jaws of death.

"Murdock is coming on."

"Mister General, sir," was the crazy man's address. "What about Solo? He's not too coherent, but he's asking about his friend, Illya."

Hunt closed his eyes and rubbed at the headache that was piercing his temples. He should have known he could not divorce himself from the operation so abruptly. It was not like just slamming a door shut. He had started this and he had to finish it, despite his personal emotions. He condemned Ivan for fearing to tread on this prickly trail of old nightmares. He must have the courage to finish what he started.

"Tell him Illya is fine. Don't give him details."

"It would give him real peace of mind if he could see his friend. It would be good for Ilya, too."

"That will have to wait until Solo is debriefed."

"The sooner you could do it the better, General. You have the power to do anything if you want to."

It was not flattery, it was fact. Hunt sighed and shook his head with reluctant acceptance. He was unprepared for the emotional strain this was continuing to exact on him.

"I'll do what I can, Murdock. Stockwell out."

It was difficult to know who was more uncomfortable, Hunt or Kuryakin. The second visit had been much smoother than the first. Ilya had been calm enough to listen to Hunt's explanation that he was not Solo, but that Solo was alive and Hunt would take him there. This course of action had not been his first choice, but, considering all the problems—Kuryakin's instability, the resemblance, the still-secret classification of the operation—he thought it best to handle things himself. The wary Kuryakin was as doubtful of the trip as the General, but agreed to go. The mental patient probably did not believe Solo was alive and went along with the plan because he was used to acquiescing to authority. Not the best of attitudes for an overseas journey, but it seemed the best they could achieve. It would have been too cruel to allow the former agents to continue to suffer separately, when their reunion could erase so much pain.

Such was the rationale used to justify his presence here at Tripler Army Hospital in Honolulu as he paced the bleak white corridor. He had personalized this mission. He had not done all this so much for Kuryakin and Solo, as for himself. He accepted that he would probably never have a reunion with his best friend, his former partner, so he had gone to great lengths to create that reunion for the other team.

He glanced at Murdock, who fidgeted with a handful of marbles. Kuryakin, in another waiting room chair, sat very still, staring straight ahead. Whatever nerves were left in the former spy were well concealed and under control.

A doctor exited the double doors at the end of the hall. He reported the rescued prisoners as malnourished and weak, but in generally good health. Under the special circumstances, visitors would be allowed now that the initial debriefings and treatments were underway.

Kuryakin hesitated.

"Go on," Murdock urged.

"I have believed Napoleon was dead for too long to believe otherwise now."

"Seeing is believing, they say," was Murdock's sage reply. Kuryakin nodded and slowly followed the doctor beyond the double doors. A nurse tapped Hunt on the shoulder and reported he had a phone call.

"Stockwell," he announced into the receiver.

"You have become too sentimental if you believe in happy endings."

Ivan.

"Thanks, old friend. You've made a big difference to a lot of people."

Hunt glanced around the corridor, but saw no one. Of course not. Ivan could be phoning from anywhere in the world. He WAS getting too sentimental if he thought he could turn the corner and meet with his old friend again. Some things could never be the same. All the king's men could reconstruct a world for two other spies, but, sadly, not for this partnership.

"I did a job," Trigorin replied coolly. "It is what I do. Buy and sell information."

And people, or worse, Hunt thought. There had been many nasty rumors about Trigorin's activities for all sides. Hunt didn't want to believe the worst of them. Part of him, the sentimental part, couldn't believe the worst of someone he still considered his friend. It was a potentially fatal flaw for a spy to harbor.

"Will you send me a bill?"

"Consider this part of an old debt. Don't expect anything else from me, Hunt."

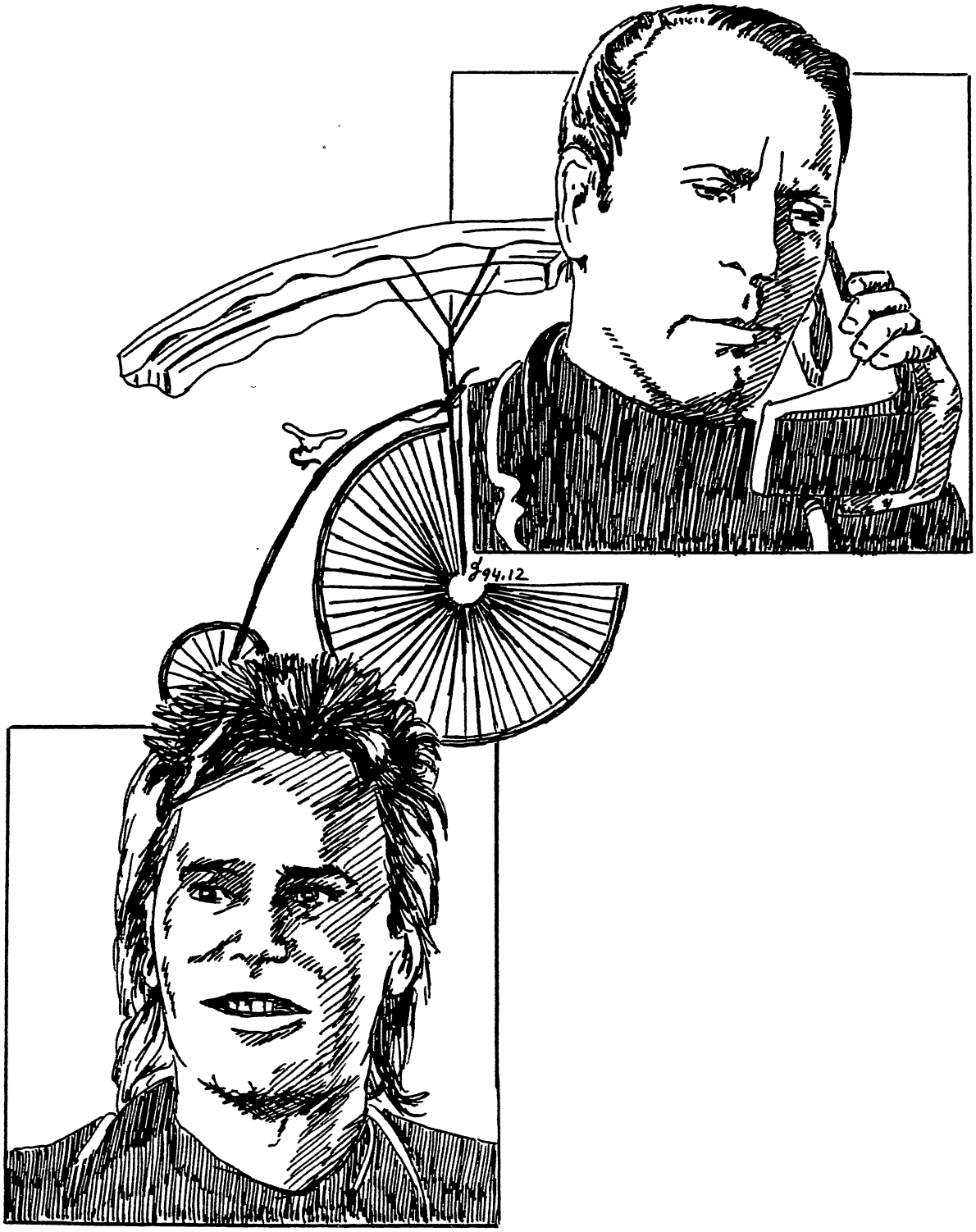
Stockwell's throat was tight with the grief from the finality of Trigorin's cold dismissal. He had been a fool to think they could put the pieces back together.

"Understood, Ivan." His voice cracked. "If you ever need me—"

"I can always find you. But I won't."

The line went dead.

Hunt hung up. He walked back to the waiting area and motioned for Murdock to join him. They would return to Los Angeles now. There was nothing left for them to do here. He did not want to get more involved with the reunion. The doubles were only superficially alike. The similarity ended there. He would probably never have a resolution to his relationship with his former partner. Even after all these years, that bitter reality was hard to live with. A grain of optimism in his heart hoped he could change that. They *had* worked together on this operation. Maybe they'd unite again someday.


Jg4.12

Steve, Over the Rainbow

by Anna Parrish

I still can't understand why Cousin Ben would make such a silly provision in his will, " Carl Winslow grumbled. "Stay here a week before we can sell the place." He looked around the farm and grimaced. "Why couldn't he simply have given it to us free and clear? But no, we had to come."

"He wanted you to fall in love with it, like he did, " Estelle Winslow said. She looked comfortable and lovely in her green and white suit. Her dark eyes pleaded with her son to understand.

"Well, I won't, " he grumbled. He tugged at his light jacket but no matter how hard he pulled at it, it would not fit around his ample form.

"Oh, Carl, " the older woman murmured, sighing.

"Why Kansas for pete's sake? Why so far away from civilization? Did you know the closest town is twenty miles away? Twenty miles, Mother!"

"Yes, Carl, I know, you've told me three times already."

"Do you know how much trouble I had to go through to get a leave of absence?"

"Yes." Estelle sighed quietly.

"A farm..." Carl glanced around once more and demanded in irritation. "And why does this confounded place seem so familiar to me? I know blame well I've never been here."

"Open your heart, Carl, when you look around. This is an exact replica of the farm in the Wizard of Oz."

"It is?" His eyes opened widely. "It is. Well, I'll be."

"Ben said he wanted to be over the rainbow all the time."

"He didn't...you know...take stuff, did he?"

"Oh, son." The woman shook her head.

"Wow!" Steve gambled forward, a young lamb in human's clothing. He wore his usual jeans, three inches too short but still folded up. Because he was so slim, he used suspenders to hold up the blue jeans. Dark eyes sparkled happily behind red rimmed glasses. "He has a pig sty! You should see it, Carl, Mama Winslow, a real, honest-to-goodness pig sty."

"There had better now be any pigs in it, " Carl said sharply. "I draw the line at feeding pigs."

Steve grinned at the cop from Chicago. "Not to worry, big guy, the sty is empty...more's the pity. Can't you just see it? Up at dawn, slopping hogs, feeding chickens. Lift that barge and tote that bale, Carl Winslow!"

"You lift it. I'm going inside. Harriet said she was going to make apple pie." Carl made a sharp turn. As he marched away purposefully toward the small farm house, he muttered to himself, low enough so Steve could not hear. "I still don't see how I got hooked in bringing him along." He shouted, "Harriet!"

"There should be chick incubator around here somewhere," Estelle said thoughtfully, searching for the old, unused machine.

"It's over on the other side of the barn. Are my eyes deceiving me, or am I in Kansas?"

Estelle laughed in real joy. "You've seen this farm on the Wizard of Oz. My nephew, Ben, spent a great deal of money remaking this place to resemble it."

"Are there any little munchkin running around?"

The older woman laughed again. "I don't think he went that far."

"More's the pity. I don't suppose he has the Emerald City tucked away anywhere?"

"No."

Steve snapped his fingers in disappointment.

A long, sleek, black cat ambled toward them. It stopped once, stretched, lifting his left, rear leg as the final portion of the process. "Mew?" It came up to them, sat down and inspected them with cryptic eyes. It blinked several times, murmured, "Meerrrr?"

"Well, hello, little fella. What's your name?"

"That's Toto, " the woman said. "At least that's what Ben's letter said. He goes with the farm."

"Toto?" Steve's unique laugher rang out. "Strange looking dog."

"Oh, Steve." But Estelle joined in the laughter.

The cat rubbed against Steve's leg. "Mew?"

"Are you hungry?"

"There should be some cat food in the kitchen. Ben said he was a house cat."

"Want to chow down then, Toto?"

"Meeeoowwww!"

"Well, come on then."

In the kitchen, Carl and Laura were seated at the table, eating apple pie. Harriet was pouring coffee into Carl's cup. "You're just in time, Mother Winslow, Steve. Who's your friend?"

Carl swung around, glancing to each side of the arrivals but saw no one. "Friend?"

"The cat, Carl. I'm talking about the cat on the floor."

"This is Toto, " Steve said proudly. "He's hungry."

"He's not getting any of the pie, " Carl announced gruffly.

"Pewftf, " the cat growled.

"Well, you're not, " the cop said in a firm voice.

Steve laughed, "Heh, heh, heh, snort. He doesn't eat pie, Carl. He eats cat food." The teenager ambled over to the cabinets. "I wonder which one it's in." The cat came over, touched the bottom one. "It's in there?"

"Oh, for Pete's sakes, Steve. The cat doesn't..." Carl began.

Steve opened the bottom door and there sat several cans of cat food. "Fish or chicken, little fella?" The cat touched a can. "Fish? Okay, fish it is."

"That cat can't talk, Steve." Carl chewed in rapture. "Best pie you ever made, Harriet."

"Thank you, Carl, but I didn't make it. It was frozen one. I found it in the freezer."

Carl stared thoughtfully at the pie and then took another bite.

"Would you like a piece of pie, Steve?" Harried inquired.

"I sure would." He opened the can of cat food. "I'll just feed Toto here and then sat down next to my little cupcake." He cast a wistful, loving glance at Laura.

"I am not your little cupcake, " the teenage girl said without looking around. "More milk, Mom." She handed her mother her glass.

"Coming right up." She hesitated and repeated her question, "Pie, Mother Winslow?"

"No, thank you, Harriet. I'll think I'll lie down. This heat is bothersome."

"I bet you there's gonna be a storm, " Steve said as he plopped the can of food into a bowl. "I'll be sure to wash this when he's through, Harriet."

"Thank you, Steve." She went to the refrigerator, poured a glass of milk. "Milk, Steve?"

"Yes, please." He sauntered to the chair next to Laura and sat down. "Hi, Sweetie."

"Steve, I am not your sweetie."

"You'll always be my sweetie, my precious, my exquisite rose, my darling Laura. You'll always be the major part of my heart." He sighed and tilted his head, gazed in adoration at the young woman he loved.

Laura demanded in mild vexation, "Why do you bother with me when Myra Monkhouse worships the ground you walk on?"

"Because I love you, Laura Winslow. I always have and I always will. You're what makes my day filled with sunshine, even when it's raining. You're the stars in my nighttime, my moon. Why, you're the whole universe."

"My heart belongs to Stefan Urquelle, Steve. He's the man I love."

"But I'm him, baby cakes, " Steve protested.

"Not by a long shot."

"But, Laura, I..." The cat scratched at the door. "Meeout," it cried. "Oh, diddle." The tall, slim teenager rose, then stopped. "Wait here, my little china dumpling. I'll be right back."

"It isn't going to change anything, " the lovely teen stated in a firm voice.

"I live to hope, sweet lady."

"Oh, brother."

Afternoon came in, sluggish and sultry. The clouds hung low. The air was stationary. There was a feeling of impending kismet. Abruptly, with startling intensity, the wind struck. In the distance, coming toward them, a swirling, cylindrical dark mass appeared.

"It's a tornado!" Harriet cried.

"Mother!" Laura wrapped her arms around her parent.

"I'll protect you, " Steve said in a valiant voice.

"Cousin Ben has a storm cellar, " Estelle said.

"Let's go, and fast!" Carl decided.

"I'll get the flashlights." Harriet broke loose from her daughter, snapped open a cabinet drawer, grabbed two flashlights and said sharply, "Let's go."

Steve picked up the cat, but on the outside, rain splattered the ground, their faces. The cat, disliking the wetness, tore free and ran furiously toward the chicken coop. "Toto!"

"Forget the cat, come on!" Carl hissed.

"I can't leave him out here!"

"Then get him and hurry up. If you're out here, when that thing hits..." Carl didn't finish. He didn't have to. Steve gulped and ran toward the coop.

Steve entered the coop. "Toto?" He stepped inside. The light was eerie, greenish. The wind tore at the door. It swayed violently. Steve swallowed thickly. "Good Toto, good cat. Toto?" The storm tore off the door. It swung inward, striking Steve Urkel on the back of the head.

Steve awoke, slowly, groggy at first. "Laura?" He saw up. The air was till, quiet, cool. He felt the back of his head. "Ow! What hit me?" The cat yowled. "What is it?" The cat ran from the coop. "Wait! Tarnation!" He rose shakily to his feet and followed the cat outside. He gaped at the awesome change in his surrounding. Huge flowers of every possible color grew in profusion around the coop.

"I don't think we're in Kansas anymore, Toto, " Steve said in awe, gazing around. "Why, if I didn't know any better, I swear we were in Oz..." Someone giggled. Steve looked around but saw no one. He shrugged and continued, "But of course that couldn't be, could it?" The cat just blinked. The gangly youth searched the territory but saw nothing but the huge, colorful flowers. "Jeepers, how do we get back to the farm? For that matter, how did we get here?" Another giggle ensued from the flowers to the right of him. "All right, you, I know you're in there. Come out with your hands up, or...or...or else!" A young boy stepped out. He was a sturdy child, with long, curly hair. "Richie!"

"I'm a munchkin!" the youngster protested.

"Well, sure you are, " Steve agreed and then laughed, Heh, Heh, heh, snorttttt! "And I suppose Glenda the good witch will just pop in, huh?" Beep, beep! The sound caught Steve's attention. He turned and saw his red and white three wheel run-about coming at him. "That's my car!" It stopped and a woman emerged. She wore a long, satin dress and carried a wand. There was a golden crown on the top of her head. "Rachel!" He put his hands on his hips, pursed his lips and declared in rigid determination, "We left you in Chicago."

"I know. They flew me out special for this gig." She grimaced, "Well, not flew exactly. Oh, poo, we had to take the bus, smelly, old thing."

"Gig?"

"This movie."

"Movie?' Steve asked, perplexed. "Why, Rachel, I do think you've flipped. We're on a farm in Kansas."

"No, we're not."

"Yes, we are, " he protested.

"No, we're not, " she argued.

"Oh, yeah?" He swayed in cocky arrogance. "Prove it."

She used her wand to point to the ground behind him. "Look." He pivoted, saw the feet sticking out from beneath the chicken coop. He took one step back, did an exaggerated double take.

"Did I do that?"

"You sure did, and boy is her sister whacked at you." Rachel closed her eyes and shook her head.

"Oh, my."

"You can say that again." She tapped him on the arm with her wand. "If it were me, I'd make tracks to the Emerald City."

"And I suppose I have to follow the yellow brick road?"

"Well...yes."

"Walking all the way?"

"Sure. I need the car to get back to the bus station." "Why don't I just ride along with you? After all, it is my car."

"You can't do that?"

"And why not, pray tell?"

"If you rode back with me, then we wouldn't have a movie."

"Oh." Steve thought long and hard. "I suppose I could go along with this. After all, I do have Toto and...hey! Where's the ugly witch? Why doesn't she appear with a puff of smoke?"

"This is a low budget flick and special effects cost too much."

"Oh. That's why you only have one munchkin, right?"

"Right."

"A little nepotistic, isn't it, to use your own son?" He stared pointedly at Richie.

"A little nepotism never hurt anyone. Besides, it was part of my contract." Steve grinned knowingly at her. "Someone had to be the munchkin. Besides, why not Richie?"

"True."

"Darn right it is."

A truth hit Steve just at that moment. "Hey! I wasn't offered a contract! How did I get into this movie?"

"We needed a Dorothy."

"But I didn't sign a contract, " he protested.

"Take it up with the union."

"Don't we even get to sing?" the teenager demanded.

"Nope. Do you know how much song writers and musicians cost?"

"No shoes either? No ruby slippers with magic powers?"

"They don't come in a man's style." Steve pouted. "You'd better get a move on. Carl plans on going back to Chicago in the morning even if it does mean he'll lose the farm. That storm really threw him for a loop."

"Oh, what the heck. You ready, Toto?" The cat sang out, "Mewtt." Steve grinned hugely. He adjusted his glasses and said, "I guess that means yes. Come on, cat, let's go find the wizard. Hey, Rachel..." But the woman and her son were already in the car and rolling away. "Well, if that doesn't take the cake...and the milk too... Heh, heh, heh, snorttt. Oh, fiddle-faddle. While in Rome...or should i say, Oz?" He laughed again and searched he ground for the yellow brick road. "Ah, there it is. Hum..." He inspected the road. It was made of yellow brick tile. "Say, this really is a low budget flick. Ours is not to reason why, ours is just to walk and sigh, to paraphrase an old saying. Come on, Toto, let's take a stroll on this lovely day." The cat and the young man sat out.

On the other side of the hill was a corn field. It was not in very good condition. Even the fence around it needed attention. It was in need of repair and paint. A huge scarecrow stood near the fence. "As I live and breathe, Carl!"

The scarecrow glared at the teenager. "Get me down!" he demanded.

"Sure thing." Steve climbed over the fence and stood silent for moment, inspecting the huge form. "A little... overstuffed... aren't we, big guy?"

"It's not my fault, " Carl snapped. "The stupid crows keep packing straw into me." Steve giggled. "Oh, for the love of... JUST GET ME DOWN!"

Steve went behind the cop, fooled with the hooks and Carl was freed. The over-weight man landed with a crash as his backside collided with the ground. "Sorry, Carl."

Carl grunted and bellyached beneath his breath as he stood up.

"I did say I was sorry, " Steve reminded the other. "At least you're well, shall we say, padded? Maybe you should think about loosing some weight."

"It's not that easy." He dusted off his clothes.

"Why, sure it is, just unpack some of that straw."

"Oh, you think it's that simple, do you?" Carl inquired, a trifle sarcastically. When Steve acquiesced, the cop demanded, "Go ahead, try to remove some of the straw." When Steve extracted several straws, two huge crows flew down with straw in their beaks and stuffed the new strands into a hole in Carl's shirt. "See?"

"Whoa, big trouble, big guy."

"Tell me about it. I gain two straws for every one lost."

"Is there anything I can do?"

Carl grimaced. "The only way I can lose weight is by being in a crow-free environment, and the only one in ten miles is in the Emerald City."

"It just so happens that I'm going there. Want to come with me?"

"Why not? I haven't got anything better to do."

"I guess it's out of the question to ask you to sing?"

"No musicians, remember?"

"I forgot. "Say, by the way, Carl, how did they rope you into doing this part?"

"I lost a bet."

"Oh. You ready, big guy?"

"Yep."

"Toto?"

"Mewt!"

After ten minutes of walking, Steve asked, "I wonder why we haven't met up with the Tin Man or the Cowardly Lion?"

"They wanted too much."

"I don't think I want to see the Emerald City."

"It's a cut-out, but the door's real enough."

"Not much of a movie, Carl."

"You didn't have to pay to get in, did you?"

"No."

"And look at it this way, how many other movies have you been in?"

"None."

"I rest my case." He scowled. "I wish I could rest my feet."

"Take a gander across that insignificant bit of meadowland, Carl."

The cop did and yelled, "Yahoo! The city! It's about time. I don't think I could go much farther." The cat made a tiny noise. It also sounded derogatory. Carl glared down at the black animal. "Oh, who asked you?!"

The city beckoned and despite hurting feet, Carl Winslow kept up with Steve and the cat as they hurried toward the cardboard replica of the Emerald City. It took five minutes to reach it. When Steve Urkel knocked on the door, another familiar face answered it.

"Eddie!" Steve said in pleased surprise.

"Hi, Steve. Hi, Dad. What are you two doing here?"

"We could ask the same of you, " Steve pointed out. Under his breath, he muttered, "As if we didn't know."

"Me? Oh, I'm guarding the door, " the older teenager said proudly.

"Bingo, " Urkel murmured and then questioned, "Against what?"

"Against what?" Puzzled, Eddie thought deeply. A pleased smile popped onto his face. "Oh, I remember now. I'm guarding against witches." He held up a sprig of green flowers. "See? Witches' breath. They hate witches' breath. Makes `em sneeze."

"Well, we're not witches, so let us in, Edward, " Carl ordered and tried the door but it remained locked. "Edward!"

"I don't think..." the cop's son began doubtfully.

"But if you're guarding the door against witches and we're not witches, then we can enter, right?" Steve suggested gently.

"Huh?" Understanding dawned. "Oh, yeah. Come on in." He opened the door.

"I'll remember this the next time I give you an allowance, " the older man grumbled.

"I'm just doing my job, Dad, " Eddie protested.

"Yeah, Carl, he's just doing his job."

"Did I ask you for your two cents, Steve?" the cop growled.

"No, but that's never stopped me before. Heh, heh, heh, snort!" He picked up the black cat who rested contentedly in the loving arms. A loud purr emanated from the animal's slim body.

"Tell me about it."

"Say, Eddie, just how do we find the wizard once we get inside?" Steve asked.

"Oh, you see her secretary."

"Her?"

Eddie grinned. "Yeah."

"Let me guess: Harriet or Mama Winslow?"

"Grandma."

"Look, we could stand here all day talking, but I have some straw to remove, remember?"

"Sure, Big Fella, let's go." The door shut behind Carl and Steve. "Which way?"

"There!" Carl said with firmness. Urkel looked in the same direction as the policeman and saw:

"We clean Tin Men, unstuff, restuff and stuff Strawmen, brush and comb Lions, Tigers and Bears."

"Oh, my, " Steve giggled.

"What?" Carl demanded.

"Nothing. See ya later, Eddie."

"See ya."

A sign inside the building informed them that appointments were needed for everything, including seeing the Wizard. All visitors must check in with the secretary. A huge arrow pointed downward. Beneath it sat a lovely, young woman.

"Laura!" Steve said in delight.

"Yes? May I help you?"

"I need a little unstuffing, " Carl said.

"I'll say, " she agreed as she opened the book.

"Watch it, young lady, " the cop warned but there was no anger on his face.

"Just kidding, Dad. Why, what do you know, we just happened to have an appointment free. Room ten. Take the elevator to the second floor. It's the third door on the left."

"Thanks." He hurried away.

"What about you, Steve?" The cat jumped from the young man's arms and hopped onto the table. Laura rubbed it's sleek body.

"I need to see the wizard."

"She's free tomorrow."

"Nothing today? You see, Laura, Carl is planning on selling the farm and I think he's making a big mistake. I have to get back to change his mind."

"She's booked until..."

"That's all right, Laura, I'll see him."

Urkel pivoted and greeted Carl's mother. "Mama Winslow."

"Looks like you got yourself into a mess, young man."

"Me?" Understanding dawned on him. "You mean the witch, right?"

"Yes."

"But she's not real, and Carl's selling the farm is."

"Oh, she's real enough. She's on her way here. That's why you have to leave now."

"I'm more than willing, but how do I get back?"

"The transmortation chamber."

"You want me to turn into Stefan?!"

The elderly lady laughed. "No. You simply go in. When you reopen the door, you'll be back home."

"Where is my chamber?"

"Down the hall. Shall we go?"

"I'm with you."

A loud clap of thunder startled them. A witch popped out of the air and landed in front of them. She was old and she was ugly, and she had a two inch wart on the left side of her nose. "Estelle ...and what do we have here? You! I know you! You killed my sister! Thief! Murderer! A foul bite of cold air! It was her turn to wash the dishes!" The cat hissed at her and she hissed back.

"I thought it'd be Harriet, " Urkel whispered to Estelle.

"No. This is a real witch."

Steve gulped. "I don't think I like being over the rainbow."

"You'll like it even less when I get through with you!"

"Now Myrtle, you forgot our agreement."

"Oh, that silly thing."

"You have to obey by it. You signed it in blood."

"All right, all right, get on with it. Person, place or thing?"

"Thing. Clue number one: Do you want pie?" Estelle asked sweetly.

"Pie?" The suspicion was heavy in her voice and on her face.

"Yes. Do you? We have strawberry, blackberry and Roddenberry."

"Roddenberry?" the old witch questioned, perplexed. She cackled. "It's blueberries, right?

"No. Clue number two: They're only known to a certain, select group, people who liked to trek to different places."

"Mountains?" Her tone still rang with mistrust. "It has to be mountains."

"No. Clue number three: They are where no man has gone before."

"This is a trick! There is no such place!"

Estelle smiled graciously. "Wrong. Clue number four: It's in my genes."

Churlishness took over. "I think you're tricking me!"

"No, I'm not."

"Why it's as simple as...the wart on your nose. Even I know it, " Steve said in deep pleasure. "Ooh, may I give the next clue?"

"May he, Myrtle? It is the last one."

A swift look of cunning fled across the homely face. "Of course."

"They beam down!"

"Sunshine!" The witch cackled in glee. "You've been talking about rays of sun all this time, haven't you!"

"No, and according to our agreement, you have to let him leave unharmed.

The witch half closed her eyes, "What is the answer, young man?"

"Captain Kirk and Mister Spock on the old Star Trek series!"

Smiling in triumphant, Myrtle turned to Estelle. "Captain Kirk and Mister Spock on the old Star Trek series, right?"

"He just told you, " Estelle reminded her, puzzled.

"I gave you the answer before you gave the last clue." The crone snickered in victory.

"That's not fair!" Estelle protested.

"So, who said I had to be fair?"

"The answer wasn't complete. There's one more name."

"No, there isn't!" the witch whined.

"Yes, there is, isn't there, Steve?"

"Yes, there is, Estelle, and this time, I'm not going to give her the answer!"

"You're not playing fair!" the witch complained.

"I'm as honorable as you are, " Mother Winslow said sternly. "Does he leave, or do I slap you with a lawsuit for breach of contract?"

"I demand a compromise!"

"I'm listening."

A sly expression took over her features. She toyed with her fingernails. "Shall we say, a race?" The witch grinned. One front tooth was missing.

"What are you up to, Myrtle?" Estelle demanded.

A rough and spotted hand flew up to rest over her heart. False innocence poured forth. "Me?"

"You. I know you, " Estelle remarked coolly. "You're up to something."

"You wound me, Estelle Winslow." The witch faked a sigh of sadness. "And I thought we were friends."

"What kind of race?" Steve wanted to know.

"The chamber is on the other side of this door, in the back of the room. If you can make it from the door to the chamber in, say, five minutes, I'll let you go? Does that sound fair?"

"Now I know you're up to something, Myrtle Hermogiknees. It doesn't take five minutes to walk from the door to the chamber."

"Well, there might be a...few...obstacles...in the way. Just a few, mind you, not many. But you're a young man, strong, energetic. You could run that race and win, couldn't you?"

"Is there any other way for me to get home, Estelle?" Steve asked.

"No."

"Then I don't have any choice, do I?"

"I' afraid you don't, Steve. I'm sorry."

"Don't sweat it, fair lady. Never let it be said that Steven Q. Urkel ran from any challenge. Open the door, Myrtle and let the race begin."

"Anything you say, young man." Myrtle opened the door. The room was filled with mirrors. "Find your way through that!" she chortled, almost choking on her glee.

"You're a disgrace to the Hermogiknees' name, Myrtle, " Estelle said sharply.

"All's fair in love and war, and, in this case, in this movie." She pulled an hourglass from her pocket. "Five minutes... starting...NOW!" She set it down upon the floor.

"Go, Steve, and remember, nothing is real."

"Nothing...?" Steve picked up the cat and went into the room...and immediately bumped into a mirror. He turned and bumped into another. He tried to feel for a hidden opening.

The sand in the hourglass continued to slip down.

"Four minutes, " the old witch reported and then cackled.

"I don't know..." He muttered, "Nothing is real?" Steve's lips turned upward. "Ohhhh! Of course! This is a movie! People break windows and mirrors all the time in movies and don't get hurt! Toto, just in case, maybe you should hide inside my shirt?" The cat went willingly enough. "Stay inside, and please don't scratch me, okay?" The cat meowed. "Here goes nothing." He jammed his elbow into the mirror in front of him. It shattered into thousands of tiny pieces. Though shards of the material covered him, he was not cut. "Wonder what it is?" Moving forward, he broke another and then another.

The witch yowled in rage.

"He's winning fair and square, " Estelle reminded her.

"You helped him!"

"You're not the only one that can bend a rule, " the Winslow mother informed the other woman.

With only a few seconds to spare, Steve and Toto made it to the chamber. The young man hurried inside and shut the door...

...And woke up in a bed in a hospital. He was surrounded by the Winslow family.

"Whoa!" Steve sat up. "You'll never guess what happened to me!"

Carl held him down. "Take it easy, Steve. You have a mild concussion. The doctor said you'll have to stay here overnight."

"I was in the land of Oz!" Steve told them in excitement.

The Winslows looked at each other. "Sure you were, " Carl said in false agreement.

"No, I was, I..." Steve stopped, sighing. They'd never believe him. He was beginning to doubt it as well. It had felt real enough, but it must have been a dream. What else could it have been?

"Never mind, " Urkel told his friends. He smiled fondly up at Laura. "Were you worried, my little kumquat?"

"We all were, Steve."

"Does that mean you love me?"

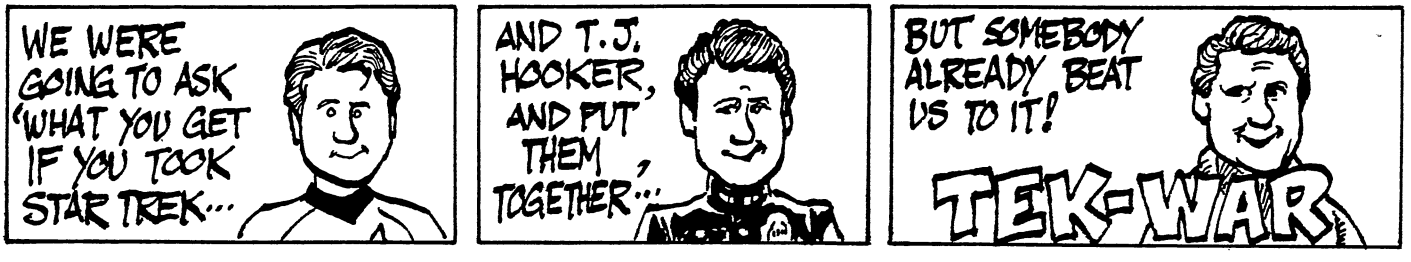
"In your dreams, " the young woman said dryly.

"We'll be back tomorrow to get you. You just rest, " Harriet said.

When the Winslow family left, Steve lay back and allowed his mind to go back over experience. The sense of reality remained though logic told him the whole incident had to be bogus. "

Oh, well, he decided, "I had fun." He inhaled softly. Yes, most defiantly, he had had fun.

His scalp itched. When he scratched, he grinned in pure pleasure for he discovered a tiny, shard of crystalline material hiding in his hair.


WE WERE GOING TO ASK 'WHAT YOU GET IF YOU TOOK STAR TREK...
AND T.J. HOOKER, AND PUT THEM TOGETHER...
BUT SOMEBODY ALREADY BEAT US TO IT!
TEK-WAR

Hellspawn

by Joseph Medina

Harlan grumbled at the prospect of leaving his trench coat in the TARDIS, but the heat indicated by the sensors would be oppressive enough for his species, possibly pleasant for his human companion. As he and David left the Twenty-First Century police aircar, wearing light and pastel-colored summer clothes, the waves of humid warmth struck Harlan in the face like a hot Jell-O mix made of blood.

David raised his arms and smiled widely. "All right! I've never been to the tropics before! This is better than those dorms I had in England and West Germany!"

"Twenty-Third Century Greece has its virtues, too, you know," Harlan said half-heartedly, fanning himself with his brown felt hat. "They have transmats. I could go somewhere safe for habitation *like* England while you could still fry your brains to your *one* heart's content."

"Okay, then let's hurry!" David shrugged. "Where do we start?"

After running a hand through his dark, damp hair and putting his hat on his head, Harlan stepped out of the alley they'd materialized in, onto the busy street. He gestured to David to follow, one hand adjusting the rose in the top buttonhole of his white jacket's lapel, as he walked along the uneven and cracked pavement to a half-naked boy selling newspapers. He bought one and walked back to David, skimming through the pages.

"Any luck?" David asked.

"Nope. No *Calvin and Hobbes.*"

Cursing under his breath, David peered at the front page. "Fort-de-France? Are we in Jamaica?"

"Martinique 1990 Anno Domini. We may have found our way back."

"Cool," he said with a grin.

"You're saying that to torture me in this convection oven of an island, aren't you?"

"Sorry."

"And another thing, I said 'may.' We're definitely close to your timeline, but not necessarily your universe."

"Always looking for bad news," he said, tapping the newspaper. Harlan slapped his hand away. "How different can it be?" "One *little thing,*" Harlan hissed as he raised a single finger in front of David's face, "one alternative action is all it takes to create a parallel timeline. The reunification of Germany could erupt into war. The Alexandrian Library might not have been destroyed. David Janssen might've had sex with a Japanese android in New Jersey when he wasn't supposed to. *Ronald Reagan might've gotten a CLUE! Just ANYTHING, okay?"*

Before David could throw his hands up in defeat, Harlan's head jerked up as if hearing a car backfire.

"What is it?"

"An intense mind," he whispered, "the most focused one for as far as my mind can reach. If you look around, it could cost someone his or her life."

David stiffened slightly, holding his breath. Harlan patted him on the back and went to the newspaper boy, speaking too softly for David to hear. After a few seconds at most, Harlan walked back toward the TARDIS, tucking his newspaper under his arm.

"Did you find out where we are?" David asked, running after him.

He kept his eyes on his destination. "Not really."

"Then why are we going back?"

"I've got to stop whoever that was."

"Who?"

Harlan gestured David to come close, whispering. "I don't know, but he's picked out his favorite wine to go with human flesh. Do you care to waste *more* time before he kills someone? Unlock the door."

David stared at him for a moment, then raced to the task.

Once the doors were open, Harlan jumped into the police aircar and went straight to the Victorian control console, dumping his newspaper into a nearby chair. David shut the doors with an urgency he hadn't really felt since the occasion when they'd materialized in the middle of a Ku Klux Klan meeting. Harlan was working furiously at the computer console section.

"I got the telephone number for the police from the newspaper boy," Harlan said. "I want to check a few things before I contact them. Can you check the newspaper for anything resembling a serial rapist or killer?"

David picked up the newspaper and began looking. "Sure. Why did you say a serial *rapist?"*

"The mind I reached was a really sick ol' puppy, very sadistic. It seemed to take a lot of pleasure in power trips, penetrating psychological defenses. I thought maybe he rapes people."

"You picked up all this from someone at a distance? It was only a second."

"Keep reading!" Harlan sighed. "To answer your question, I did say this was an intensely focused mind, a lot more than most humans should be capable of. It was as if this one was pushing his mind to the limit, demanding so much intellectual and sensory activity. If my understanding is correct, such mental activity would normally turn a typical human mind to mush."

"Why?"

"Sensory overload. It's a built-in mechanism in most beings, like future shock. A person can take only so much of anything before the pressure becomes too much, and some kind of fail-safe procedure, for a lack of better word, will have taken over: a catatonic state to cut off the sensory input, a temporary retreat from danger, maybe even an attempt to stop the problem at the source. T. S. Eliot once said that humans could take only so much reality—"

"I think I...Oh, no."

Harlan stopped his work to go see what David had found, taking the newspaper as his companion pointed at an article. "Here," he told Harlan nervously.

"'Law enforcement authorities throughout the islands have received warnings from FBI agents searching for American serial killer Hannibal Lecter. The FBI believes that Lecter has left the United States bound for South America....' Hannibal *Lecter?"*

"As in *The Silence of the Lambs."*

"From three, maybe four, of Thomas Harris's books. That wasn't the only book that character showed up in."

"What DIFFERENCE does it make?" David shouted. "We're *still* stuck in the parallel universes, and now we're in the middle of a story with the *worst* serial killer in fictional history!"

"Come on, the worst serial killer wouldn't know how to kill so much as a deli tray—"

"The *hell* with semantics, OKAY?"

"Okay, okay," Harlan said, his hands held up. "What are you worried about, anyway? You're safe here."

David found himself on his feet, unsure exactly when he leapt out of the chair, and self-consciously sitting in it again. "Well...how would you like to think about *being* a deli tray?"

Harlan nodded, stroking his mustache thoughtfully before going back to work at the communication controls at the console.

"Are you calling the cops, then?"

"I'm ready to. The communications station has tapped into the cellular phone satellite networks of the planet. But we can't call on the police yet."

David stared, his tongue fumbling for words. "Are you serious? A minute ago, you were all Gangbusters!"

"Psionic eavesdropping isn't exactly useful evidence on this planet right now, *is it?* We may not even be able to identify him! At the end of the book you mentioned, Hannibal Lecter is in the middle of injecting silicone into his face—do-it-yourself plastic surgery! How do we know if this universe parallels the book or the film, you see where I'm going? If this is the book, the cops can't identify him unless they just happen to find the right place on the planet to check for fingerprints. And we still have to comb this *entire* island *just* to find him. I'm on my own."

"What about me?"

"No. Just me." Harlan took his key to the TARDIS from his pocket and gave it to David. "If I don't come back, access the navigational computer and consult the files on the power surge inductor and Bixby protocols. You'll get home."

"You're talking as if he could kill you."

Harlan took the rose from his lapel and left it on the hexagonal control console. "There is only so much even regeneration can do for a Time Lord. Watch the viewscreen. If I come back, you'll have to let me in."

David watched him go out the door, unnerved by the realization that, except for his hat and leather shoes, Harlan was dressed in white.

Someone entered a modest studio apartment, its blinds open and the dresser in the corner empty, not long afterward. He put a weekend bag next to the rest of his baggage, which was all in front of the dresser. On the surface the room seemed much like its present occupant, orderly and quite ordinary. If either was examined closely for more than a few seconds, one might realize how uncompromisingly organized everything in the room was, no wrinkles in the bed sheets, everything stacked and laid in only one

direction, order be-coming even more shrill in the silence than chaos. The room was much like its present occupant.

He went to the dresser to use one of the combs he'd left, which were in exact side-by-side formation. As he took it, he stopped and raised his head slightly as if catching a glimpse or a whiff of something, like a dog hearing something beyond the range of human beings.

Don't tell me he knows I'm here, Harlan thought, a mental grumble to distract his anxious aspect. *What was it, the scent left over from my rose, my sweat in this bloody ice-forsaken island, what? I didn't leave anything out there. I checked. Was it my breathing....*

He heard footsteps muffled from the rugs on the floor, closer.

Sounds like he's going around the room, looking...Damn it all, he's looking for me. He does know. I thought I was the only psionic on the island. Well, he definitely isn't—wait, I don't know that. And here I am, burbling in my own skull.

One of the drawers slid open and clacked against the wood of its bureau as it was slammed back in place.

I'm wasting precious time; okay, what to do, what to do. Limit physical contact and keep him in sight at all times. He's intelligent and resourceful. He might've devised some plan for just this occasion. He could be armed.

Another drawer was opened. It sounded much closer, about a meter or two from his hiding place.

He could be hungry.

Harlan listened more intently, focusing his mind.

No gun. There's no sound, nothing to suggest loading ammunition or even a speed loader. It could be a knife, a blackjack, even pantyhose for all I know. What the hell is he doing? Can I risk an empathic scan? If his mind's so intense, my mind at this range could even be disoriented enough to deprive me of a chance to react, so what the hell can I—

"Hello."

His teeth ground together to stifle a gasp. *Damn him.*

Harlan looked down from the tight corner in the bathroom ceiling in which he'd lodged himself. Below him, by the door to the bathroom, a tall Caucasian man grinned effortlessly up at him. His gaze felt like a knife. Harlan tried to return the glance in kind, without apparent difficulty. To insist on staying up there was stupid, suicidal at best. All the other man would have to do was wait until Harlan got tired. He had to come down.

With his hair slicked back and his eyes piercing into Harlan with such fascination, Hannibal Lecter looked like a snake.

"That was rather unexpected."

"Must be a pleasant change for you," Harlan muttered.

"Yes, it is. Can I offer you something?"

"How about backing away from the door by about one meter and forty-seven centimeters?"

Lecter smiled again as if about to let out a chuckle, then slowly complied. Harlan landed directly in front of the doorway on all fours, his white jacket flapping about him like wings.

"And get the hell away from the door. We're leaving together or not at all, Doctor Lecter."

He adjusted his scarlet shirt as Harlan entered the apartment proper. "As you say. Tell me, Mister...."

Time to use the old alias. "Harlan Gaspar."

"Thank you, Harlan—"

"Don't mention it," Harlan growled.

"—I'm rather curious how you found me."

"You wouldn't believe me."

"Very well. Do you have any special precautions in mind, any idea at all how you would overpower me, if you don't mind my asking?"

To a being who was accustomed to shielding his entire mind from the probing minds of fellow Time Lords, hiding his emotions was not difficult...but not necessarily easy.

"Not thoroughly, I admit."

"Your candor is refreshing under the circumstances. Thank you. But are you going to arrest me?"

"The local police are coming. I stayed to make sure you didn't leave before they could get here." *I can't even risk an empathic strike, can I? Might not even work.*

"So then...you yourself...aren't a policeman, are you? Not an official member of the constabulary," he said with relish.

"I'm official enough to crack your spine in seven places if you give me any hassle, Doctor Lecter."

"You sound American."

"That's because of the tele—You wouldn't believe that, either."

"Are you involved with the FBI in some way?"

Funny...he doesn't look like Anthony Hopkins. "No."

"You strike me as a rather interesting man," he said with obvious anticipation. "Could you tell me where you live or what your line of work is? We seem to have the time."

"I guess you could say I'm an investigator, a scientist by trade, not that it'd concern you, Doctor." *Or even Brian Cox.*

"You know, Harlan," Lecter said as he came closer, "I've just received what you might call an epiphany. I don't believe that you're a policeman at all. I don't believe you ever contacted the police, either. I detect a strong predilection toward falsehood of which I disapprove most considerably. In fact, I don't believe that you've told me the truth at all."

Harlan raised his hands, ready to deliver a Twin Dragon Strike. "Fine. I'll settle for two or three cracks in your spine instead of seven."

"Are you willing to settle...for much less?"

Lecter reached for one of the dresser drawers and pulled it clear out, throwing it at him. Harlan tried to dodge, mapping out in his head the geography of the room and tracking Lecter's place in it, and got struck in the side before it knocked him backward a few inches and crashed behind him. Lecter pounced on him as Harlan picked up the drawer, kicking aside the clothes that fell out, and slammed it square into Lecter's mid-section.

"We're *even!"* Harlan shouted as he put his leg behind Lecter.

Lecter stiffened and pushed him to the floor, using his own body as a fulcrum, then going for the drawer as Harlan hit the ground. Trying to keep himself oriented to the arrangement of the room, Harlan rolled into Lecter, colliding with his legs, forcing him to the floor as well. Refusing to let Harlan keep the initiative, Lecter grabbed the shoulder strap of one of his weekend bags and swung the weekend bag into Harlan's face. In itself, it wasn't an effective offensive move, but just enough to further distract his opponent by biting into his leg. Harlan felt Lecter's teeth breaking skin, tearing at his flesh, and screamed as the blood ran and as the nerves began to fry. He was then let go.

Harlan moved the bag aside and looked at Lecter, his blood smudged all over and inside Lecter's mouth. Lecter's crystal-like blue eyes lost their glint of determination and confidence, and only after several seconds did they meet his gaze. Harlan waited for him to speak, in vain.

"What is it?" he said. "What the hell are you waiting for, Lecter? Don't tell me I don't taste good en—Yes.

"That's the problem, isn't it? A connoisseur like you, right? You've slaughtered and eaten so much human flesh by now that you can discern even what certain bodies taste like! But my blood doesn't taste right, does it, Lecter?"

He watched a reaction, then refused to wait to find Lecter's limit.

"You're trying to write off the weird flavor of my blood to something you can understand, *aren't* you? Blood disorder? No. Unusual blood type, possibly. Drugs or medicine? I don't use any. I'm not even ill. I'm a rather unusual vintage, aren't I? But there's one reason that you don't dare contemplate, because that's beyond your ability to believe! And it's the only reason—I'm not human! I have two hearts to your *one*. My brain activity, even when I was born, can operate hundreds of times faster than yours. While your body temperature is at ninetyeight degrees Fahrenheit or some outrageous number like that, mine is sixty degrees. My biology evolved in *another* biosphere, another *planet!* What do you mean, 'no?' I'm not homo sapiens! I should know!"

Harlan rubbed his palm on his bleeding wound and planted it right over Lecter's quivering mouth, keeping his fingers wrapped around his jaw, shoving Lecter as he resisted his very touch. "Come on. Still not sure? Try more! Come on, *more!* Make up your mind, you monster. *Now! NOW!"*

Harlan kept shouting at him and shoving him, taunting him to drink more of his blood until he realized that Lecter had let his hands fall to his side, lifeless, inert vines from a dead tree. His eyes seemed to turn to blue glass. When Harlan carefully took his hand off of Lecter's face, Lecter simply didn't move. His mouth gradually came shut, his lips stained by Harlan's blood like a girl trying lipstick for the first time. Once he was sure that Lecter was in fact catatonic, he went into the bathroom to find something to disinfect the wound in his leg and called the police, giving them a suitably believable story before he left for the TARDIS.

When he walked into the alley to go to the TARDIS, David had already opened the door for him. Harlan went inside, mindful of the pain in his leg.

David met him at the door, lightly slapping him on the arm once or twice. "I knew you'd come b—your leg! What happened?"

"The police have Lecter in custody. He'll never harm anyone again. That's all that matters. Chair, please?"

"Uh. Yeah." David rolled an antique desk chair to Harlan and ran for a medical kit. When he returned, Harlan took it and rolled up his trouser leg to work on the wound more properly. "Jeez...did he do that?"

Harlan nodded as he passed a hand-held scanner over the torn teeth marks in his leg and sprayed them. "It'll heal without any problems. It just hurts a lot."

David smiled. "Wow. You did it. You *nailed* Hannibal Lecter!"

"Did I."

"You just said so," he offered with a confused smile.

"That Hannibal Lecter. Theoretically, there could be several more parallel realities with Hannibal Lecters in each one, possibly hundreds of universes where we won't be there to stop any of them. What about your universe? Jack the Ripper was never caught. What about the Green River Killer, Zodiac, a run of-the-mill rapist, or any given drive-by shooting? Who's going to save people from all that when we aren't there? It doesn't seem like much of a victory, does it."

David sighed and pursed his lips as Harlan used another spray on his leg. After closing up the first-aid kit, Harlan limped to the hexagonal console's navigational controls and input a new set of coordinates, sending them back into the Vortex. The dark, Victorian control console began to hum serenely.

"Any idea where we're going now?" David said cautiously.

"Not yet. I need time to start my calculations to see how much closer we are to finding our way home." After putting his rose back into his lapel, he tossed his felt hat onto the arm of a nearby coat stand, watching it sail to its resting place. He grinned and adjusted his spectacles. "Let's see how many more people we can save on the way, hm?

WHAT DO YOU GET IF YOU TAKE WORZEL GUMMIDGE...
ER?
AND TEAM HIM UP WITH 'THE AVENGERS' TARA KING?...
THE SCARECROW AND MRS. KING
AHEM! I'M A MISS!
CLOSE ENOUGH!

Learning to Live Forever
September 24, 2077

by Timothy Dedeaux

I'm older than your mentor's mentor," Nicholas said, pulling me aside, "so how did you get so much older than me?"

"Just lucky, I guess," I sighed. I wanted to leave. I wanted to crawl off into a hole somewhere and wait for somebody to come along and take my head. But that wasn't an option. I'm almost thankful for friends like Nick and Janette dragging me out, making me meet people, forcing me out of my isolation. I don't know what's worse, the awkward struggle every time I see another face and have to go through the motions with another woman, or the quiet times during the day when I sit and shudder, missing Sasha, remembering her as she aged and grew old, and, finally, died. She'd lived almost eighty years, and we'd been married over fifty. Somehow she'd escaped being a victim of the game like Tessa, and I'd slowly grown to love her more than life itself. As time passed, I lost the ability to imagine life without her. And now I'm living it. If you can call it living.

I can remember the day she died like it was yesterday. I held her in my arms and cried like a baby, then screamed at Nick, begging, then cursing him, then begging him again to save her. He reached down to touch her neck, shook his head, and whispered, "I'm sorry, it's too late." I don't think I'd ever seen a vampire cry before.

Nicholas and Janette are back together, sort of. It seems that time has smoothed over whatever passed between them, and Janette's mellowed out a little. She's not quite as bloodthirsty as she used to be. It seems like watching his friends in the police department die from crime and old age made Nick more willing to rely on the one person he knew would be around forever.

LaCroix had the misfortune of coming around the week of the funeral. Nicholas and Janette still fear him, after all these years. They fear him, and he uses that power. But I am not his child, and I was distraught. With my sword at his throat, I told him that if he ever returned, I would take his head and burn whatever remained. I don't know if it was my voice or the Quickening he feared, but he left us then, without a word. He'll be back, and I wonder now if I could follow through with that promise. He is ancient, and incredibly strong, and yet he still fears me. Maybe he's really just a coward at heart, fearing anyone with the strength of will to resist him.

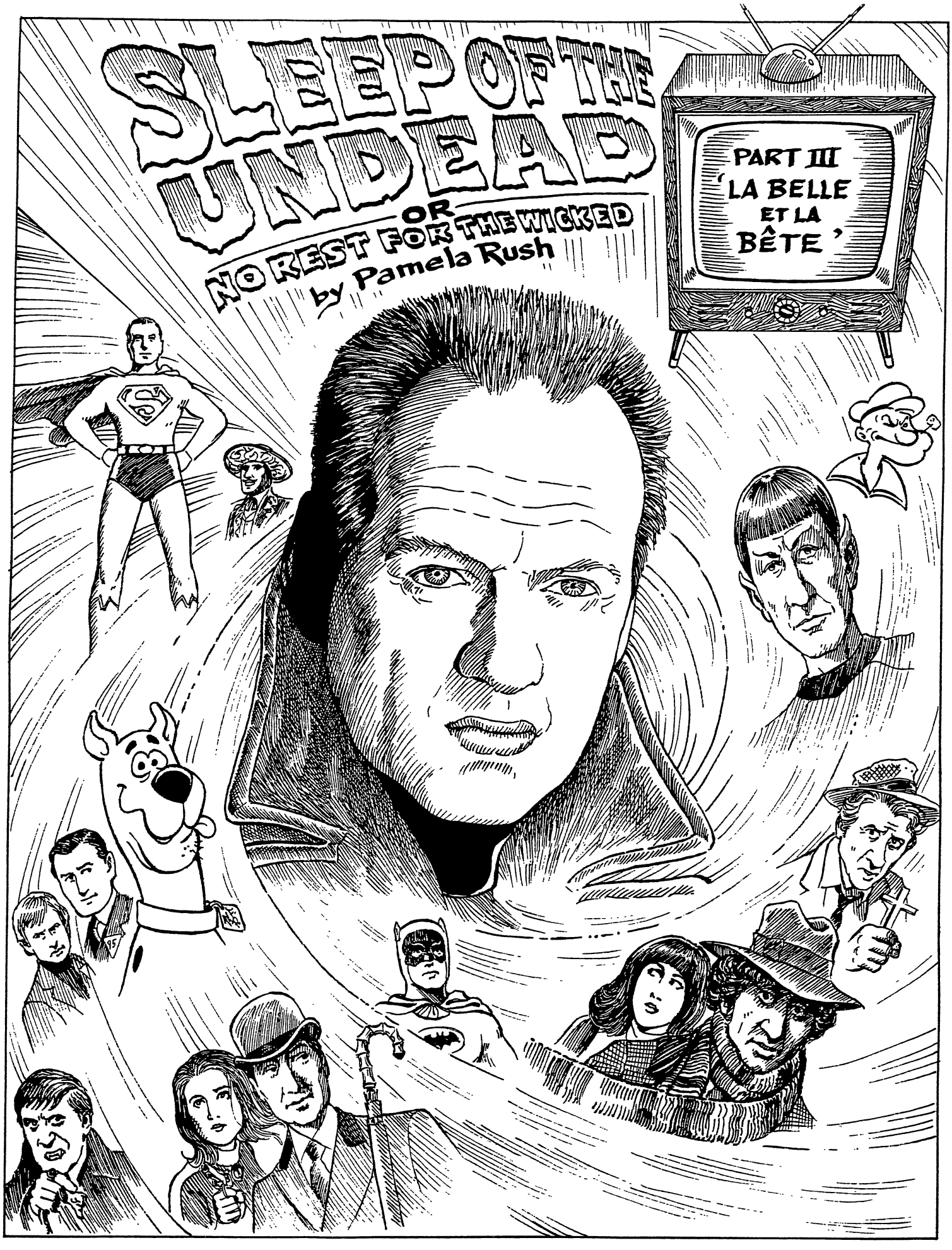
I need a drink.

So this is how I live now. I try to do a little business during the day, and Nick and Janette try to bring me back to life after sundown. But mostly I just try to remember and try to forget. And sometimes try to find a way to love again. Nicholas and Janette spend more time trying to find a woman to replace Sasha than anything else. So the last one didn't work out. Big surprise. Janette's bringing another one by tonight. The doorbell's ringing. I should probably get it. A power splits the air like silent thunder. Good God, what's that? I scramble for my sword as the door opens. Another immortal. Janette's there with a woman I've never seen before. Our eyes met, and our heads buzz.

"Hello," the redhead says, extending her hand, "I'm Charity Phillips, of the Clan Carmichael."

"Richard Ryan." I shake her hand.

Here we go again.


SLEEP OF THE UNDEAD
OR
NO REST FOR THE WICKED
by Pamela Rush
PART III
'LA BELLE ET LA BÊTE'

Foreword

The action of the continuing story of "Sleep of the Undead" takes place while the vampire LaCroix is unconscious, missing and presumed really dead (as opposed to merely undead) after his defeat at the hands of Nick Knight during the premiere episodes of "Forever Knight." In our story, LaCroix lies safely hidden in a secret lair recuperating from his injuries but troubled by recurring nightmares generated by a radiating television cable service. In his dreams, he suffers through unfortunate encounters with the Lone Ranger, Julia Child and Dr. Who; later he visits "The Late Show with David Letterman" and forwards his worst nightmare to Nick Knight in "An Aside." And now, unauthorized, uncopyrighted and unrepentant, the saga continues–

Scene I: *La Belle et la Bête*

The long, deep sleep—almost hibernation—that comes upon the undead in need of healing had benefited LaCroix physically, but his mind had been deeply troubled by disturbing fancies and unwelcome phantasms, intruders from other almost familiar yet wholly foreign worlds...

Hey, Cisco, wait for me....

Lassie, Lassie! Come home girl....

Good evening, I'm Robert MacNeil in....

Hey, Aaaaabott!

...strange visitor from another planet who came....

Applying his not inconsiderable powers of ratiocination, LaCroix deduced that he must make the attempt to force his way through the confused layers of overlapping images back to his own world; he must recover his own reality before he could recover himself. He seemed to retain a little more memory with each new experience in the dream worlds. The last attempt to come to himself, dimly recalled now, had been somehow closer to his own reality than the previous dream worlds; at least it had been on CBS....[1]

CBS!...CBS?... A hideous presentiment of lowering disaster shuddered through LaCroix as the ominous initialism burned itself into his brain. Another strange, stray, meaningless thought not his own, yet fraught with somewhat turgid foreshadowing. His torturers were still manipulating his mind but he was increasingly aware of their stratagem and more adept at resisting it.

LaCroix searched the images that flickered behind his closed eyelids for one that would take him a step closer to his own world. He must try again....he must conjure a world....perhaps this one!

The glacial eyes opened. Damnation. He had awoke here before and it had been unpleasant and humiliating; there was no profit to repeating it.[2] Perhaps if he simply closed his eyes again it would all go away....

Footsteps echoed in the muffling silence of the thick, pearly fog. LaCroix refused to look. Voices wafted towards him: a precise, clipped baritone and an attractive, husky contralto in earnest conversation. The pair drew close to his position and paused:

"Ah, Professor Moriarty, I presume?"

"No. Go away."

A nonplused pause ensued.

"It is true, Mr. Holmes, that he bears little resemblance to the description that I have been given," said the warm contralto, dripping in LaCroix's ears like honey on a hot night.

LaCroix squelched the impulse to examine the woman belonging to that enticing voice; he would simply refuse to join the game and it would all fade away.

"Miss Adler, it is logical that Moriarty shall way lay us on this errand; this man appears at the proper place at the appointed time; no other man appears; therefore, this man is Moriarty. Of course, he would deny it, although it seems a feeble ruse for the 'Mastermind of Crime'."

"Altogether too feeble, Mr. Holmes. He is altogether too tall as well, a characteristic impossible to counterfeit except with excessively cunning appliances, which, if you will but observe, you may readily perceive that this gentleman does not employ."

Sadly, LaCroix realized that he was not going to fade away from this scene. He sighed and opened his eyes. Apparently the only way out of these damnable phantasmagorias was to suffer through them. He recalled, too, that the last one had not ended so very badly for him; perhaps his luck was turning.

"You have discovered me! I *am* Professor Moriarty," LaCroix agreed slyly. "May we now proceed?"

---

[1] See LaCroix's visit to "The Late Show" in "Sleep of the Undead II." It was not a happy event for David Letterman.

[2] LaCroix visited Victorian London previously in "Sleep of the Undead I." It was not a happy event for LaCroix.

"Ah-ha! I knew it! Moriarty, I doubt not you have conceived a *cunning plan,* but you shall not bend us from our purpose!" The pale man's eyes flashed weirdly.

"I do not desire to detain you, sir and madame." LaCroix's glance intercepted an alluring look from the dark woman and he had to suppress an impulse for his gaze to linger on her face with its porcelain skin and vivid, exotic features. "I merely ask that we finish this charade as soon as possible."

Another uncomfortable pause followed. Mr. Holmes stared at LaCroix. LaCroix and Miss Adler exchanged a look vibrant with unspoken possibilities; Miss Adler coyly averted her gaze and pouted charmingly. LaCroix examined her Victorian-style costume, an elaborate lavender ensemble enclosing a petite but well-rounded figure, with warm approval.

"Indeed, nothing is proceeding at all, Mr. Holmes," she commented pointedly, but with an inviting half-smile for LaCroix.

Simultaneously, LaCroix and Holmes turned to stare into the thick of the fog behind them; LaCroix realized with surprise that Holmes' hearing must be as acute as his own. Another man approached them, walking steadily but without hurry. Even as his figure became dimly visible, the outline of a belted coat and a soft hat pulled low over his face becoming discernible, Holmes welcomed him:

"My good Watson, here's the game! 'Ware Moriarty!"

The man in the soft hat frowned and said in a deeper, hard-edged voice, "I am *not* your good Watson. What is going on here?"

Miss Adler quirked her eyebrows. "Perhaps you are Professor Moriarty?" she hazarded with a suggestion of laughter in her expressive voice.

"Hhhmmm. A master of disguise...." mused Holmes, darting comparative glances at LaCroix and the newcomer.

"I am not bloody Moriarty, either. I'm Dixon Hill, Private Investigator. What I wish explained immediately is just what you are doing here, *Mr. Holmes*, in San Francisco?"

Holmes' pale, stiff features became almost animated as he defended himself: "Sir, whoever you may be, I am Sherlock Holmes and this is London in the year 1889.

"No, sir, it is not. This is 1938 San Francisco; Sherlock Holmes has no business here!"

Of a sudden, the baying of a gigantic hound sounded through the fog and immediately upon the sound the beast itself, as large as a very large dog, slavering between jaws opened wide as it hurtled dead at Miss Adler! Inexplicably alarmed for another before himself, LaCroix transformed before thought could form and interposed himself between the animal and the lady, flashing eyes and fangs and talons to rival those of the enormous beast.

With a howl, the animal was upon him; LaCroix grasped it firmly fore and aft and with supernatural strength heaved it away into the dark where it could be heard scrabbling and whining as it skulked away into the fog. LaCroix, recovering himself, turned anxiously to Miss Adler who, although apparently undamaged, seemed well inclined to languish on the support of his shoulder for a lengthy recuperation.

"Are you all right, Miss Adler?"

"Call me Irene...and thank you so much. You *are* full of surprises," she commented coquettishly, snuggling in for the winter; LaCroix slid one arm securely about her waist for common courtesy.

"Strange," expounded Mr. Holmes, examining LaCroix with some interest, "Count Dracula should not appear in either story line."

"I am *not* bloody Count Dracula," hissed LaCroix between clenched jaws, distracted even from this alluring *amourette*[3] by an insult so base that it caused the gold to flood back into his eyes. "Dracula is a fictional character!"

Miss Adler raised her gaze to LaCroix's face, letting her head fall back against his arm and exposing the pale, slender column of her throat to him: "Well, sir, so are we all," she sighed regretfully.

"Very interesting," interrupted Mr. Holmes. "The vampire or *wampyre*, the undead, *vampiro* in Spanish; *der Nachzeher* to the Germans; *kyuketsuki* in Japan; *vrykoklas* in Greece; *dearg-dul* in Gaelic; *rakshasas* in Hindi; *chiang-shin* in Chinese; *ekimmu* in Mesopotamian; *obayifo* in Ashanti; *pontianak* in Malaysian; *upir* in Slovak; *gronnskjegg* in Norwegian; *upirini* in Serbo-Croatian; *cihuateteoc* in Aztec; *aswang* in Filipino—"

"Miss Adler, you are practically reclining!" interrupted Hill, glaring at her reprovingly and then fixing his eyes challengingly on LaCroix: "If you are not Dracula, who are you?"

"Don't start that up again!" spat out LaCroix.

"What?"

"No, Who[4]!"

"'Who'?"

"Precisely!"

"...I apprehend," said Holmes, who had been placidly lecturing on the while, interrupting himself for a change, "that

---

[3](French) shameless hussy.
[4]LaCroix met Dr. Who in "Sleep of the Undead I."

it is a reference to the password of a certain secret religious brotherhood of ancient times; it began with, 'Who's on first,' which was countered with, 'What's on—"

The other three greeted Mr. Holmes' history lesson with keen apathy; Hill cut him off in mid-oration:

"Really, Mr. Holmes, this is a debacle!" Hill said, his deep voice sharp with obvious irritation.

"Gentlemen, gentlemen, please...." Miss Adler admonished them, smiling languidly at LaCroix. "Although I was just beginning to enjoy it myself, it is apparent that this program is hopelessly compromised. I suggest that we adjourn for now and straighten out the mix up." With a regretful look, she unwound herself from LaCroix and stood back. She reminded LaCroix of Cleopatra; her charm was certainly equal to that of the temptress of the Nile.

Hill straightened to a military posture. "Computer, end program."

Even after his recent sorties into the dream worlds, LaCroix was momentarily taken aback at the instantaneous change of scene: immediately upon the words, the street scene disappeared to be replaced by a large, cubical room of which all six surfaces were dull, flat gray marked with grid lines.

LaCroix had actually made a complete turn around to examine the peculiar compartment and so was startled to see, when he turned back to his companions, that all three of them were staring fixedly at him with expressions indicative of persons surprised by finding unexpected talent in a performing chicken.

"Computer, end program," said Mr. Holmes, and they all looked pointedly at LaCroix. He wondered what would now appear or disappear but nothing happened.

LaCroix broke the tense silence: "Where do we proceed from here?" he asked. "I am quite anxious to...finish this."

"I was afraid we had," said Miss Adler, with something of a calculating nuance in her tone and a revived sparkle in her eye.

"Who the hell are you?" exclaimed Hill.

"I believe I am Professor Moriarty," he replied.

"Professor Moriarty would have disappeared with the program," Miss Adler explained. "Don't be frightened; we mean you no harm. But, I'm afraid you are going to have to answer some questions."

Scene II: *Toujours la Nuit*

Well, Mr. LaCroix," your story is somewhat less than satisfactory but we shall allow it to rest there for the moment."

The man who had introduced himself anew as Captain Picard frowned as he stood up. LaCroix had been interrogated thoroughly by the same trio he had met in what he now knew to be called a ***holodeck***, but had admitted only to his name and to being a lone, lost traveler. In turn, he had been told that he was now aboard a self-contained sailing vessel in the depths of outer space; space beyond the moon and stars

of the heavens that he knew. It was difficult to believe, yet the view from the porthole supported this astonishing allegation.

The dark woman, even more revealingly attired than before in a form-fitting jumpsuit, still in shades of lavender, had introduced herself the second time as Counselor Deanna Troi. The pale man introduced as Cmdr. Data was, incredibly, an automaton.

LaCroix was relieved when Picard indicated an end to the session and torn between hoping that this nightmare would now dissolve or, contrarily, that he might have the opportunity to pursue a more personal conversation with the delightful Counselor.

"Sir, I think it's time to show our guest the *courtesy* of the *Enterprise*," said Troi as she, too, arose, addressing the Captain but never taking her eyes from LaCroix.

"By all means—for now," responded the commanding officer.

"However, you will confine yourselves to this room with security posted."

"Oh, we can manage here, I'm sure," she cooed, moving gracefully to take LaCroix's arm and draw him toward the other end of the long room. "May I offer you some refreshment?"

A film of gold washed over his eyes and an indrawn breath hissed over emerging fangs as he briefly reacted to the sensuous image of feeding from this delicious mortal but even as the thought crossed his mind, LaCroix felt a deeper longing to share more than a temporary feeding frenzy with this vibrant woman. Was he seriously considering asking her...no, inviting her...no, begging her!...to join him in eternal unlife?

"The historical bloodsucker is reputed to have preferred to drain his sustenance from the living bodies of the donors," commented Cmdr. Data, whose excellent hearing unfortunately leant itself to eavesdropping shamelessly on private conversations.

"Oh, dear," sighed Troi, "I'm not certain that the replicator can manage that."

"Thank you, but I do not require refreshment presently; your charming company is delight enough," LaCroix said, hoping that Data would take the hint to afford them some privacy.

"Oh, please try the replicator; it can easily provide you with any blood type you wish and no doubt some exotic types you might like to sample. Some are reputed to supply quite a rush...or even perform as...aphrodisiacs."

Not quite believing what this seemed to imply, or which implication might most profitably be followed up first, or even—if she did not let up on him—of urgent necessity pursued, LaCroix inquired delicately, "Different blood types? Where, exactly does the...ummm...supply originate?"

"Replicated substances are created chemically from the atomic level," responded Cmdr. Data, butting in as usual, "and match the molecular constituency of the original to within a plus or minus .000001 variation of subspace thermal wokadoodles...."

"Data, that's enough," snapped Troi rather sharply. "You'll have to excuse him, Mr. LaCroix; Treknobabble is built into his programming and sometimes he can't stop. But it does, indeed, mean that you can order any type of human...or Betazoid...or other blood from the replicator; I assure you that you will not be able to detect any difference."

As the Commander showed every sign of hanging about where patently he was not wanted, LaCroix quickly evolved a *cunning plan* to pose him a technological question that might keep the automaton pontificating away indefinitely under cover of which torrent he and Deanna might, perchance, be able to converse intimately themselves:

"Commander, perhaps you would be so kind as to explain the *holodeck* to me? I have some experience with both illusion and transmogrification but I have never seen any so remarkably detailed, thorough and convincing before."

"Although the technology is complex," replied the automaton, "the purpose is quite simple: a holodeck supplies the fantasy experience necessary to integrate and implement the ego and the id in humans and, indeed, in the majority of species of sentients known to the Federation. The histories of all the worlds of the Federation suggest that until a society achieves a reliable method for attaining this end, civilization stagnates in a pre-self-cognizant stage. Before the invention of the holodeck, the human race, for instance, depended entirely upon the non-technological social phenomenon known as the 'fan club' and later on the primitive technology of its successor, the 'electronic discussion list,' to fulfill this basic psychological integration. The holodeck performs the same function at the highest possible level of virtual reality and in more fully—"

Meanwhile, ignoring the spouting man-machine, LaCroix turned the delectable Counselor and himself towards the porthole, half-facing each other, so that Data was excluded by the broad shoulders of the tall vampire. "Actually, Counselor, I am not very hungry. Instead, explain to me this view, this *outer space*."

"Oh, please call me Deanna," murmured Troi.

They stood closer than was strictly necessary, Troi retaining her hold on LaCroix's arm, before the wide viewing port in

the side of the vessel that revealed a myriad startlingly bright pinpricks of light piercing a vast, velvety blackness.

"Well, it is merely space. Also known as outer space, as opposed to space between things, or at least things like planets and satellites that don't have very much space between them, although that is still much more space than, for instance, the space between us." A provocative smile punctuated her speech. "It's mostly just vastly spacious. And dark, of course; it's really very dark. There are a number of objects in it, or, rather, the outer space is between them—but they are relatively few and far between—in fact, the far between is outer space."

"You are not a...a science officer, are you?"

"Oh, no."

"I thought not."

"Oh dear, wasn't I very clear?"

"Ah, yes, perfectly clear." Actually, the smitten vampire had been too preoccupied with watching Troi's exquisite lips to pay much attention to her extraordinarily muddled explanation anyway. But now he forced his mind back onto the track of the conversation and an alarming thought occurred: he had been in this dream world

—if dream this was—much longer than any of the others and time did appear to be passing in a normal manner despite the exotic locale.

"Tell me something else, Deanna. How long is it until sunrise?"

"Well, it's..."

"Sunrise is not a phenomenon that is encountered on a vessel in space, sir," interrupted Cmdr. Data, to no one's great surprise, "unless, of course, the ship were to be fixed in a solar orbit that approximated, or, more exactly, were to fall into the range of angles and periods of rotation of planets in relationship to a solar prime that produces the phenomenon of sunrise. And, of course, sunset."

Two pairs of lips moved slightly as they attempted to work this out.

"You mean," said LaCroix finally, alarming yet exciting ideas beginning to germinate, "that it is always like this," he indicated the star speckled darkness of the porthole, "that there is never a sunrise and it is always night!"

"Yes, it is forev..."

"Please, Data, don't interrupt!" scowled Deanna. "But, yes, you are perfectly correct, Mr. LaCroix; it's dark all the time."

It's dark all the time, thought LaCroix. *What marvelous possibilities.... What a good* title *for a....*

"Are you just going to stand there talking all watch?" said Captain Picard, silently hopping up behind them to stare out at the view over Troi's outside shoulder. "Shouldn't there be some Cardassians or rogue Klingons or a purple-mucky-telepathic space creature out there by now? This is an *action* program, you know!"

"Captain," said Cmdr. Data, "it is my duty to point out that this program may be malfunctioning as well."

"Nonsense, Mr. Data; we have the highest ratings of any syndicated action program ever!"

"Yes, Sir. But I meant the *other* kind of program...."

"Oh, I see. Yes, I tend to concur. Perhaps we should try to adjust it from the control room," said the Captain.

"Oh, wait," cried Counselor Troi, clutching LaCroix's arm with both hands, "I'm having fun now! Let's go on a little longer...."

"No, I think not. Computer, end program."

Scene III: *La Coche de la Nuit*

LaCroix was prepared for the immediate change of scene from the well-appointed meeting room to the plain, grey, square room. However, he was startled to see that this time both the holodeck itself and his companions had, in a split moment, shrunk perceptibly as well as transformed in aspect.

Cmdr. Data now seemed to resemble most closely a very large hog wearing a metallic-silver space suit; Counselor Troi was still undeniably seductive, perhaps more so, transformed into a dainty but voluptuous blonde pig with a peach-blossom complexion and long-lashed, lapis blue eyes.

The Captain's appearance, on other hand, had suffered from the transformation: while his head was still bald, it and, indeed, his entire person (now perfectly visible as he had also transmogrified into a nudist) was now a bilious pea-green and his expressive eyes could only be described as goggling.

Again, three pairs of eyes fixed on LaCroix as though expecting a remarkable event. Again, the expectant expressions frozen on their faces thawed and melted away in disappointment; or, perhaps—dared he hope?—one face was glad to see him still here, still the same.

"I think it's time we had a little talk about consideration for other's preferences around here—namely *moi*!" said the succulent sow, now attired in a sequined lavender jumpsuit, in a voice that could have grated coconut and did a pretty good job on the frog.

"But we had to do it, First Mate Piggy," winced the former Captain turned amphibian, removing himself a careful distance from the irate First Mate. "That sketch was completely bogged down and it's only a half hour show."

"Uh, who's he supposed to be now, then?" asked the former Cmdr. Data, whose synapses apparently had gotten a lot slower in his last transformation, indicating LaCroix.

LaCroix felt a tender thrill when the transformed First Mate sprang to his defense: "He's the guest star and I'm *keeping* him," she glared alternately at the other two.

"Ok, Ok. No problemo," the frog surrendered to obvious *force majeure*. "I just wanted to tell the guest star, 'FANGS' for the memories!"

"Groaner!" shouted the two pigs in unison, inexplicably doubling over in laughter.

"Well, he has a 'STAKE' in this show, too!" continued the frog. The crew of the starship *Swine Trek* (as it was identified by badges on the pigs' uniforms) fell about shrieking in uncontrollable hilarity. LaCroix began to edge nervously away from his lady love.

"What did the witch doctor say to the vampire?"

"I'll bite!" exclaimed the muscle-bound porker.

"*Au contraire*[5]!" interjected LaCroix despite intentions of remaining completely removed from this ludicrous conversation.

"Oh, you speak French!" LaCroix had reclaimed the lovely First Mate's attention and, possibly, her sanity as she focused on him once again. "How romantic, *mon beau blondin,*[6]" she cooed.

"That 'COFFIN' is going to be the death of you!" continued the frog unrepentantly.

General hysteria ensued; LaCroix had heard better. Much better.

"Oh, you shouldn't have said that!" gasped Piggy.

"But he 'CASKET' me!" retorted the frog. "Of course, I hope the guest star won't be offended by this 'VEIN' of humor!"

"Oh, stop it," cried the First Mate, snorting delicately. "You've PUN-ished us enough!"

"Sorry, I can't help myself. It's genetic. My whole extended family is addicted to it! You see, I have a *punning clan.*"

---

[5](French) no way, dude.

[6](French) my handsome child, chap, beau, young man, gentleman caller.

There was something about the very air of this place that provoked indescribably cretinous humor; LaCroix fervently hoped—almost he would have traded the last two thousand years for the ability to pray—that it was not contagious.

"Ok, Ok," said the frog, sobering somewhat. "Let's go to the bridge and see whether the guest star can get this turkey flying again."

"No wonder it's a turkey; all the actors are getting a 'POULTRY' salary!" Giggling broke out afresh as the First Mate added some japesome fuel to the fire as they filed out of the holodeck close behind the frog.

LaCroix, feeling like a turnip in a fruit salad, was glad to undertake a change of menu—uh, sorry—venue, hoping it would be for the better or at least intelligible.

As they moved in single file down a short, cramped corridor and into a dingy ship's control room with a ceiling too low for LaCroix's comfort, he realized that this space ship was an altogether different proposition from the one on which he had found himself captive earlier. But, reassuringly, the view through the centrally placed screen was still the Stygian blackness of space—although the visible portion of outer space seemed somehow...grubbier?

The bridge was rather seriously overcrowded when all four of them had pushed into the small compartment. LaCroix found himself intoxicatingly close to masses of tempestuously tumbling blonde hair and flashing, cerulean blue eyes shaded by incredibly long lashes, lashes that fluttered beguiling in his direction.

"Come to think of it, I'm the Captain in this skit," began the husky boar, having arrived at that conclusion after only five minutes of serious concentration, "and the First Mate can't decide who the guest star is, or who gets to keep him either. Anyway, I thought the guest star this week was the Borg collective?"

"Stuff it, Hogthrob," hissed First Mate Piggy aside, while coyly sidling up against the bemused LaCroix.

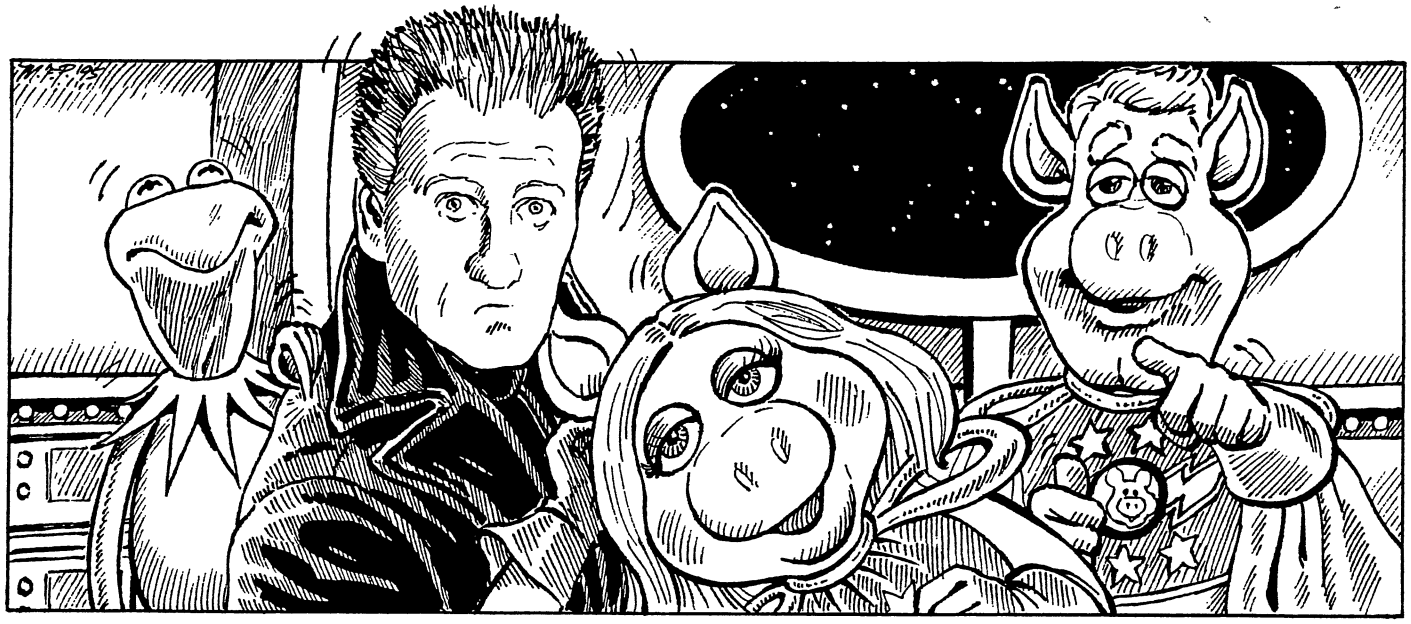
"You are still in uniform, First Mate!" barked the hog-Captain.

"Stuff it, *Sir!*" she snapped.

"But, he's right, Piggy," interrupted the frog, trying to convince her from a discreet distance.

"And I'll tell you something else: this skit isn't actually all that much better than the last one," mused Captain Hogthrob. "Computer, en..."

"That does it!" cried the lovely and intrepid First Mate, whipping about suddenly and launching herself fearlessly through the air at Hogthrob. "You're geometry, Hogthrob! HEH-YAAAAAA!"



"History, Piggy, history!" cried the frog, hopping well out of harm's path with practiced speed.

"Whatever!"

A well-executed karate chop to the neck, a reverse choke headlock and the Amazonian pig frog-marched—so to speak—the helpless Captain into the airlock.

"Enough's enough; you're not going to get away with that again!" she growled as she quickly cycled the airlock, ejecting the hapless porker into outer space. The First Mate aroused to righteous indignation was not a sight to forget easily, although you could try.

"Magnificent!" exclaimed LaCroix, admiring the expediency of her diplomatic style. "You are such a practical choker!"

Oh, gods; had he really said that—*aloud*?

"Piggy, that's not in the script!" interpolated the frog, jumping up and down anxiously.

"Watch it, frog! *You* are not even supposed to be in this sketch! Why don't you just vamoose before I get seriously cheesed off!"

"And leave you alone with the vampi...uh, I mean, the guest star? No, Piggy, wild horses couldn't drag me AAAAHHHHHaaaaaah hhhhaaaaeeeiiiiiii...."

LaCroix and Piggy watched the small herd of wild horses drag the screaming frog out through the airlock with a good deal of surprise but no very noticeable degree of regret.

"Those sort of...inexplicable things keep happening to me now," reflected LaCroix, unusually philosophical. "I used to think that I, myself, was the inexplicable thing. Now...I don't know...somehow nothing is what it used to be....I am beginning to wonder....are we all puppets of some malefic force beyond our understanding?"

"Don't say that!" A shudder ran through her lithe, Zeppelin-like body.

"What other explanation is there?"

"No, I mean don't say that *word*; the 'p' word."

"What?"

"*P-u-p-e-t-t*," came the badly spelt but patently heartfelt reply.

"Oh. You know, I was wondering about—But...never mind. For you, *ma belle coche*,[7] anything. It will never pollute my lips again! To be frank, I think—"

"And don't call me Frank!"

"What?"

"Never mind. Just don't."

---

[7] (French) my beautiful (feminine) pig.

"Of course, *ma chérie.*[8] I promise you. Are we safe from interruption now?"

"Sure. No one in the crew—or in his right mind, for that matter—would interrupt me, I mean...us, now!"

"Then I need restrain myself no longer! Your hair, your eyes, your lips—or whatever—drive me mad, mad I tell you, mad with longing for this..." he cried, crushing her extra-firm foam body in his arms and raining passionate kisses on her upturned face, er...snout...or whatever.

"Hmpht," mumbled the disheveled First Mate, gasping for air sometime later, "what a kisser! It's like...like...you never pause to breathe! I think I'm in love again."

"Do you feel that, as well? I, too, know that our souls have met before! And, please, this time can I get your name and address? But no matter what form you wear, no matter what name you take, no matter what world we walk in, my soul resounds to yours! Even if fate separates us again, I will always remember you as 'THE WOMAN'—or, er...whatever."

"Oh, how...trite," she whispered coyly. Or was it "tripe"? Perhaps it were better left unclarified along with the butter. LaCroix felt that action would speed his cause better than words; he bent over her supple form intending to take what he needed so desperately and to reward her faithfulness with sempiternal togetherness...and hesitated.

Could he do it? Could he corrupt this ethereal innocent with her penchant for grievous bodily harm and force her into his dark and deeply open-to-Freudian-interpretation world? Could he avoid the Amazonian headlock? Would he cloak her almost annoying effervescence in the darkness of eternal bloodlust? Make her forever his, but forever other than she was now...?

LaCroix gave an inarticulate cry, the only sign of the unutterable agony of indecision in his heart.

"Oh, *mon chou,*[9]" cried the sensitive Piggy, "*que pasa, amigo*[10]?" clutching as much of him as she could manage to her glorious lavender bosom.

"I have an unutterable agony in my heart!"

"Oh. Ah. Sorry about that. It's my ship's insignia—see, the silver pin bit is sticking you...ummm...sorry. Really."

"Thank you. That's much better. *Ma coeur*[11]! Before I met you...in my debased arrogance...in my blind ignorance...I would never have believed it. But it is true, *chérie*, it is true! The love of a good woman—or whatever—can change a man.

"—or whatever," muttered the divine swine *sotto voce.*[12]

"Oh, *ma petite porc-chop,*[13] I must confess to you that I have lived—or whatever—an unlife of the most unimaginable and horrendous depravity!" confessed the infatuated vampire in a low and trembling voice. "I cannot expect you to find even in the sweetest, kindest, most sacrificing and forgiving heart the balls to save me from myself, to forgive me, to absolve me of the sin of an alternative lifestyle, to lend me the strength to recover the path from which I strayed so long ago; and yet, I cannot but hope—desperate, minuscule, hopeless hope that it is—that you might, somehow, find a way...?"

"Oh, you're such a worry-wart! Forget about it! I've always liked a little spice in a man—or whatever. Devil's food is my favorite flavor! And...I think it's about time for a little snack! Come're, you big lug!"

Overcome by the unaccustomed surge of politically correct feelings brought on by magnanimous do-gooding, LaCroix swept the svelte swine into his manly—or whatever—embrace once again....

Of a sudden, the airlock door groaned open and then clanged closed as the frog hurled himself into the control room, stick-like limbs whirling and protuberant eyes fixing suspiciously on the lovers, who tried to appear nonchalantly as though they had *not* just been sucking their brains out through their lips—or whatever.

"I am Kermit of Borg," he intoned. "It's not easy being assimilated! Are you all right, Piggy?"

"*Moi*? I am not merely 'all right,' I happen to be perfect, as a matter of undisputed fact."

"Sure. Well, I have some bad news for you and the demon lover. Time is up!"

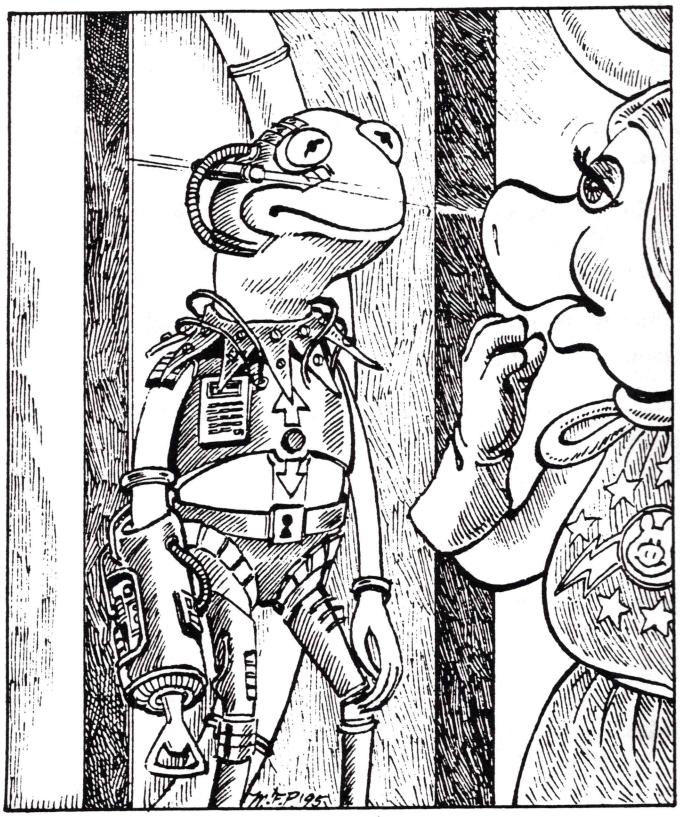
"Oh, don't be so stuffy. Besides, that just means we can adjourn to my dressing room where it's much cozier and I can slip into...."

"No, Piggy, I mean *time is up* for our guest star—or whatever. You see, we got a call from...." The frog drew close to the First Mate and whispered earnestly in her pertly curling ear.

---

[8](French) my (feminine) darling.
[9](French) my cabbage (affectionate).
[10](Spanish) what's going down, man?
[11](Colloquial) a beer brewed west of the Rockies.

[12](Italian) a hushed sort of snit.
[13](French) my little midnight snack.



"*Rien du tout*[14]! Just when it was beginning to get hot," she pouted. "Oh, well; *que será, será*[15] But let me break the news; just give us one minute—*alone.*"

The frog could resist neither the sweet appeal in those chlorine blue eyes nor the tone of voice that managed to suggest as subtly as, say, a good sized brickbat that non-compliant frogs might end up minus some necessary frog parts.

"Ok. But I'll just remind you, "said the frog, giving LaCroix a flinty glare, "that overfamiliarity with a pig is still a crime in many states...or on many planets...or whatever!" With a last worried look, he left the bridge more conventionally than the last time.

The statuesque pig raised hyacinth-blue eyes with unshed tears shimmering like dew drops prismed by the clear, pale light of dawn to the tall, wan vampire.

"Be brave, *mon concombre grand*[16]. Duty compels us both; I'm afraid you must go back to your own world now."

"But, *mon petit paté de foie*[17], I want to stay with you—to stay here with you in outer space," cried the enamored preternatural being, "I want to be with you! And I need to be where it is...forever night."

"Exactly. And they need you, too, big guy."

"No, no, I cannot leave you, *ma cassoulet*[18]!"

"Oh, jeeze, you're to-die-for-romantic and, believe me, this is just killing me, but I'm afraid you will have to go home. You see, *mon radis*[19], you've been renewed!"

"Oh, yes, *ma saucisse épice*[20], my love for you has renewed my soul!"

"That, too, naturally; but in this case I mean that CBS has renewed your soul—I mean *show*!"

LaCroix shuddered as the ominous initials branded upon his flinching brain flamed again! It was the omen he had dreamed before first meeting the voluptuous mistress of his fate. Then he had suffered a flash of inexplicable fear but now the unimaginable tragedy it portended so heavy-handedly was revealed!

"The show must go on; you're back in production. They need you more than I do. Don't worry about *moi*; I have my fans, and my frog. Good-bye, *mon cornichon bleme.*[21] Maybe next season you'll have a good hair day and get some decent special effects—like this one...."

LaCroix cried out in agony as the warm life and vital spirit—that had too, too briefly thawed his frozen soul so that for too, too short a moment the flowering of a passion such as he had not known for two millennia, although sometimes it seemed like 2001, seemed once again a glorious possibility—faded from his very arms.

Grasp her as he might, he could not hold a wraith. As his heart, once too frigid to feel such pain, shattered with a shudder that shook him to the very shenter—oh, sorry—center of his ancient bones, he realized that the bridge of the *Swine Trek* was dissolving around him, too. Just before consciousness failed him, he heard the beloved voice, faintly and fading, one last time:

"*Au revoir,*[22] *mon gros navet.*[23] Maybe you'd like to be a guest star on my Christmas special? Have your agent call the frog...."

---

[14](French) damn it all.
[15](Spanish) shit happens.
[16](French) my big cucumber.
[17](French) my little chopped liver appetizer.

[18](French) my simmering pork, goose, mutton and white bean casserole.
[19](French) my root vegetable.
[20](French) my spicy sausage ball.
[21](French) my pallid pickle.
[22](French) until the reservoir refills.
[23](French) my great turnip; a big flop (of a play, entertainment or film); what a turkey (slang).

Epilogue

The frog sidled around the edge of the door, checking the tantrum temperature before committing himself to entering. He clutched a bouquet of blood-red, hothouse roses larger than himself in his scrawny, green arms. The small dressing room was already crowded with elaborate and expensive floral offerings, scenting the air with their heavy but melancholy perfume.

The sole occupant of the room reclined glamorously but languidly on a velvet chaise lounge, sipping wild cherry LaCroix and sighing intermittently.

"Ah, Piggy…more roses for you. Can I do anything else for you?"

"*Non. Merci.*" The voice was faint and disinterested.

"Hmm, don't you want to know who sent the flowers?" The frog twitched the gilt-edged card out from amongst the heavy-headed blooms and offered it to the forlorn love-goddess.

"*Non.* It's just some hopelessly infatuated fan, as usual. He's been sending them for days now. I just want to be alone for a little while…alone with my memories."

"Oh. Well. Ok. Later then—Or just call…if, if you want…anything."

The frog crammed the bouquet carelessly in amongst the others, the little card dropping unnoticed to the floor where it lay face up but ignored:

Please, please, please.
My life is pointless without you.

GWD

And now, back to your regularly scheduled programming…until you dream again!

THE END

Cast of the Players

Irene/Deanna/Piggy.....Madeline Kahn

Hill/Picard/Frog.....Sean Connery

Holmes/Data/Hogthrob.....Kevin Costner

special guest appearance by

LaCroix.....Himself